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Constructing the National Canon in Ireland and Macedonia: The Function of Folklore in the Plays *The Countess Cathleen* and *The Land of Heart's Desire* by William Butler Yeats, and *Proud Flesh* and *The Black Hole* by Goran Stefanovski and Their Role in Strengthening National Identity

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Introduction

> The distinction between art and non-art, or between aesthetic and other intentions and responses, as well as those more flexible distinctions by which elements of a process, or intentions and responses are seen, in real cases, as predominant or subordinate, can be seen as they historically are: as variable social forms within which the relevant practices are perceived and organised. Thus the distinctions are not eternal verities or supra-historical categories, but actual elements of social organization.
>
> Raymond Williams[1]

> To encounter the nation *as it is written* displays a temporality of culture and social consciousness more in tune with the partial, over-determined process by which textual meaning is produced through the articulation of difference in language […] Such an approach contests the traditional authority of those national objects of knowledge – Tradition, People, the Reason of State, High Culture, for instance – whose pedagogical value often relies on their representation as holistic concepts located within an evolutionary narrative of historical continuity.
>
> Homi Bhabha[2]

The approach to canon formation adopted in this analysis will be to discuss it as a matter of institutionalisation of literature in relation to education and theatre, and in that respect it will be treated more as a phenomenon that distributes cultural ideologies, rather than as something that represents aesthetic principles. Following Raymond Williams who defines art as a set of socio-cultural relationships and the social practices that derive from them, as well as that at given historical circumstances different forms of artistic production are considered to be art, or simply significant works of art perceived as high

[1] Lewis, Justin and Miller, Toby, eds, *Critical Cultural Policy Studies: A Reader* (Malden, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p.190.
[2] Bhabha, Homi, K., *Nation and Narration* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), pp.2-3.

culture, while others are subordinate, or marginalized forms of (artistic) production, we can argue that it is impossible to detach not only the definition of art, but also its production and reproduction (by means of its canonization), from the ongoing socio-cultural and political processes, and that the construction of the canon, and especially the national canon, depends largely on the social context.

In that respect, following Sarah Corse's argument that 'national canonical status is rooted in national exceptionalism'[3], I shall explore the idea that beyond the criteria of the national canon lies a tendency to preserve and standardise a selection of literary works which appear to champion the ideology of national identity and thus conform to the interests of the socio-cultural systems of nation-states. Hence, its importance shall be discussed within the frames of the nation-state since, as Kolbas argues: 'with the formation of modern nation-state and the rise of professional criticism it [*the canon*][4] also acquired the nationalistic and exclusive connotations that are still in evidence today'[5].

Therefore, I shall present four plays by two canonical authors: *The Countess Cathleen* (1892) and *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894) by William Butler Yeats and *Proud Flesh* (1979) and *The Black Hole* (1985) by Goran Stefanovski, viewing them respectively in the context and as a part of the national literary canon in Ireland and Macedonia. The plays will be primarily seen in relation to their social environments, as well as their dependence on the socio-cultural systems in terms of the ideology of national identity and the reproduction of nationhood through the use of what is credited as national folklore and its official institutionalisation and recognition after the establishment of nation-states. From this standpoint, I will argue that national identity can be culturally and ideologically reproduced by the use of folklore in literature, and that folklore elements are not only symbolic representations of the historicity of a nation, but also appear to give validity to both its past, present, and future. In this respect, Svetlana Boym's use of the concept of nostalgia as illusory memory will be applied to folklore, and notions like the concept of the Other and the symbols of the house and land in the plays will be discussed (through the elements of folklore) as structural components that

[3] Corse, Sarah, M. *Nationalism and Literature: The Politics of Culture in Canada and the United States* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.4.
[4] My emphasis.
[5] Kolbas, Dean E., *Critical Theory and the Literary Canon* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001), p.3.

internalise national identity. Therefore folklore, as a central category of this analysis, shall be considered as an illusory national narrative, namely as a cross-national phenomenon whose concept of "authenticity" derives from the nation-state's demand for exclusivity, and whose reproduction is established through the cultural and literary narratives represented in the national canon.

Given that the ideology interwoven in canon formation emerged as an issue that provoked debates primarily because of its educational, and therefore, social function to reproduce and transmit certain selected values, this analysis will aim to determine the function and role of the specified canonical works in upholding the socio-cultural value and ideology of national identity. Education, the main institution that nowadays generates the canon, as well as other cultural institutions such as the theatre, and especially the national theatre as a social site, can be treated as mechanisms for national identity reproduction. Since the nature of education is such that it conveys knowledge, determines the flow of information and thought, it thus facilitates the process of its reproduction. My point is not to infer from this any negative implications of education: as Deleuze rightly claimed, it is not education that is ideological in itself, but it is this specific role that makes it appear ideological: 'The problem of education is not ideological in nature, it is a problem of the organization of power: the specificity of educational power makes it appear ideological'.[6] In the same way, it is not necessarily true that the ideas expressed in a literary work are ideological in themselves, but rather, it is the way they are used and adopted by socio-cultural institutions that makes them ideological. To be exact, education functions as a vital element in the chain of ideas which are communicated to people in the process of acquisition of knowledge and cultural products. In the same way, the canon as strategy of education and a symbol in the network of cultural products, relates to the social processes that convey a certain type of information, information which is never complete, objective or finite, as is the concept of art, and is therefore always susceptible to manipulation.

Therefore, in this case, the canon will be seen as a social strategy that maintains the national culture which unites and at the same time controls people by imposing its

[6] Deleuze, Gilles, *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*, ed. by Lapoujade, David (Paris: Les editions de Minuit, 2002), p.264.

rules, the same culture which governs the ideas of what functions best in the preservation of the values of a nation and their perception within the frames of the expected social performance, opposing the claims of ardent defenders of the canon, such as Harold Bloom, who argue that the importance of the canon derives solely from aesthetic values. Thus, in *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* Bloom suggests criteria that are decisive for canon inclusion referring to them as 'aesthetic strength'[7] asserting that aesthetics 'is constituted primarily of an amalgam: mastery of figurative language, originality, cognitive power, knowledge, exuberance of diction'.[8] Even if we adhere to the principles of what is defined as aesthetics, we can hardly escape Bourdieu's famous statement that 'there is no way out of the game of culture'[9], since the question that still arises is who decides whether a certain literary work is endowed with them or not. Thus, the canon as 'a cultural instrument'[10] and its formation remain dependent on socio-political influences and cultural determinants. Additionally, John Guillory argues that 'the politics of canon formation has been understood as a politics of representation – the representation or lack of representation of certain social groups'[11] which always involves the category of social identity. In that respect, I shall not focus on the representation of the groups per se, but the category of social identity, namely the ideology of national identity, its social value and politics of its inclusion in literature and its institutionalisation through the canon.

In the political sphere of Western states national identity has gained primary importance as opposed to other types of social identities as a category which is manifested in and through the collective values of the nation as an imagined community[12]. The social currents that generated its rise can be traced to the birth of the nation-state in Europe after the French Revolution, a trend which flourished at the end of the eighteenth and in the nineteenth century, continuing up to the present day, despite the

[7] Bloom, Harold, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), p. 29.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Guillory, John, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.325.
[10] Gorak, Jan, *The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea* (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone, 1991), p.65.
[11] *Cultural Capital*, p.5.
[12] Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2003).

'lack of congruence between the nation and the state'[13]. Being founded on the basis of a shared common territory, origin, culture, tradition, language, economic and legal-political components, the significance of keeping citizens or compatriots together in an artificial construction like the nation-state through the cohesive power of national identity, became an issue of crucial interest. In addition, the stable, organised, and controlled state provides, through its institutions, an absolute legitimacy of national identity, thus discarding external ideological factors that represent a possible counter-identity that may threaten its stability, hence always striving to restore its stability and safety. In that respect, Smith infers that nation-states act as 'guardians of national identity'[14], and that by the early twentieth century the importance of the nation-state in the Western world came to such prominence that 'only nations with states of their own could feel secure in the world of "nation-states"'[15].

The social reproduction of the discourse that attaches importance to national identity stems from the actual narrative which constructs it. Stuart Hall distinguishes among five aspects or 'discursive strategies'[16] to the national culture, three of which can be recognised in the plays and analysed in terms of folklore and which I shall discuss here regarding Svetlana Boym's concept of nostalgia[17]: *emphasis on origins, continuity, tradition, and timelessness; invention of tradition* (understood in Hobsbawm's sense as a set of practices which 'inculcate certain values […] by repetition which automatically implies continuity with the past'[18]), and the fictitious idea of the *pure, original people,* or *folk.* Consequently, considering Adam Dundes's definition of folk as a group that share traditions 'which help the group have a sense of group identity'[19] we can infer that *the folk* is bound by elements which strengthen collective values and creates their group identity and that their folklore represents a significant section of their common identity that defines their perception as its members. Therefore, folklore assumes importance as

[13] Smith, Anthony D., *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p.15.
[14] Ibid., p.168.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Wodak, Ruth; de Cillia, Rudolf; Reisigl, Martin; Liebhart, Karin, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity,* 2nd edition, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009) pp.23-24
[17] Ibid., p. 24
[18] Hobsbawm, Eric and Ranger, Terence, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, Canto edition), p. 1.
[19] Dundes, Adam, *Interpreting Folklore,* (Bloomington, London: Indiana University Press, 1980) pp.6-7.

part of an "authentic" ethno-history and its definitions are always related to national and collective identification. For instance, the Macedonian folklorist Ilija Velev, refers to it as folk art which needs to be nurtured and whose experiences need to be used for the simple reason of reflecting individuality and self-recognition, national identification, spiritual rebirth and general affirmation.[20] Thus, folklore becomes an additional social agent that grants assumed exclusivity to the nation, affirming the idea of national identity as provider of a 'community of "history and destiny"'[21] that saves people from personal oblivion and restores collective faith, at the same time guaranteeing "authenticity".[22]

Additionally, Ernest Gellner further argues that with the development of the modern nation-state folk culture is represented either as 'created memory' or 'induced oblivion'[23] (the latter implying Kammen's definition of nostalgia as history without guilt[24]), adding that 'in the case of ethnic groups dominated by a ruling class of foreign origin and lacking a continuous high culture, such as Ireland and Finland [*Macedonia as well*][25], a modern high culture had to be created from existing folk traditions'.[26] Therefore, with regard to the national canonical literature that stands in opposition to foreign influences, folklore elements shall be regarded as reinforcement to the national identity discourse, as well as elements whose reiteration reveals more about the present, rather than about the past per se representing narratives which write the nation (in Bhabha's connotation) only at a given socio-cultural context. However, as illusory, created memory, whose transnational character will reveal its fluidity, and the fictitiousness of its assumed "authenticity", instead of pointing to national identity exceptionalism, paradoxically, folklore will disclose its non-exceptionalism. Thus, to encounter the nation written by illusory constructed memory implies that the nation and national identity eventually become part of that memory and that the canon, as a cultural instrument that generates it, aids the process of their reproduction as such.

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[20] Velev, Ilija, 'Folklorot i folkloristikata – tradicija ili sovremenost?', *Makedonski folklor, XXXII/63*, (Skopje, 2006), p.41.
[21] *National Identity*, p. 161.
[22] Ibid., p.162.
[23] Giolláin, Diarmuid Ó, 'Folk Culture' in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. by. Cleary, Joe and Connoly, Claire, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.226.
[24] *The Future of Nostalgia*.
[25] My emphasis.
[26] *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*.

II. The socio-cultural context of the canon

It is indisputable that artistic and literary creations, either canonical or non-canonical, are not bereft of the political and socio-cultural processes that determine the context of their production, as well as that the production itself sometimes acts as a vehicle for construction of the context. Although the first paradigm will be primary to my analysis of the plays by Yeats and Stefanovski as canonical authors, I shall not neglect the second claim as well, since after their canonical status is recognised they begin to exercise a legitimate social influence, thus acting as ideological tools.

The starting point for my analysis of the plays will be their contextualisation in the historical and socio-cultural milieu in which they were produced as literary forms. Therefore, their social relevance cannot be established unless a profound insight into the historical conditions that shaped the perception of reality is taken into account. Consequently, the emergence of Yeats and Stefanovski on the literary scene in Ireland and Macedonia respectively, will be discussed only after considering the socio-cultural framework of the identity politics and the identity crisis as the main instigator of the need for constant reiteration of the discourse of national identity. Hence, discussing the dependence of Yeats's writing and his reputation as a writer on the social factors, Foster claimed that his 'work is inseparable from the historical tradition and social subculture which produced him'.[27] For the Macedonian context, not inadvertently, Georgi Stardelov, one of the most eminent (socially recognized) Macedonian literary critics, argues that Stefanovski's plays represent everything that occurred in the life span of the Macedonian national collective and its history[28]. Moreover, Stefanovski himself infers that since reality cannot be invented, it is impossible for him to write, for instance, a play about a feminist since the Macedonian technology of everyday life will not make her appear specific enough.[29]

[27] Foster, R. F., 'Protestant Magic: W.B. Yeats and the Spell of Irish History' in *Yeats's Political Identities* ed. by Allison, Jonathan (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), p.83.
[28]Stardelov, Georgi, 'Goran Stefanovski (1952) or Vita Triumphatrix' in *Seminar for Macedonian Language, Literature and Culture* 8-28, VIII (Skopje and Ohrid: Ss Cyril and Methodius University, 1986).
[29] Stefanovski, Goran, *Prikazni od Diviot Istok* (Skopje: Tabernakul, 2005).

In addition, the reception of their plays in specific historical circumstances demonstrates the manner in which socio-cultural factors create the attitude towards their appreciation as works of art. Regarding these particular plays, the authors' defiance of the established values and their clash with the prevalent policy of national identity contributes to a negative reception, while compliance more likely results in praise and affirmation. Therefore, Yeats's initially harshly criticised plays which later became part of the Irish national canon will be discussed in the context of their denigration of the e prevalent Catholic identity discourse at the end of the nineteenth-century and the beginning of the twentieth century in Ireland. However, the subsequent social acknowledgment of these plays will be seen through the significance they offer as literary works that, above all, stand as representations of Irish national identity, namely, as ideological opposition to the English colonial past. Additionally, the paradox of the literary canon that comprises the aspect of longevity and the assertion that it survives the test of time, but at the same time of its mutability and its disposition to change alongside other historical transformations bear witness to the different approach to his plays.

Unlike Yeats's case, Stefanovski's immediate success demonstrates that different socio-cultural constellations in which the work was not considered to be controversial are likely to result in acclaim. Namely, his identity interpretations that are in line with the prevalent national identity policy as well as the tradition that has regarded folklore as a national heritage, facilitate his entry in the national canon. In this regard, Anthony Smith's claim that the tradition of the non-Western model of a nation common in Eastern Europe and Asia which emphasized the importance of the community of birth, and especially of the native culture, could be accepted as a basis for the creation of favourable circumstances in which vernacular culture, and thus folklore could be employed and further reproduced as a means of encouraging national identity.[30] Even more so, folklore is still very much a constituent element of many cultural productions in Macedonia. Therefore no socio-cultural obstacles[31] stood in the way of Stefanovski who, maintaining the discourse of national identity, only continued the already established practice of folklore recognition. By contrast, in the period when Yeats was actively involved in the

[30] For further reference see Smith, Antony, *National Identity*, p. 12.
[31] This aspect shall be discussed further on in the analysis.

Celtic Revival, Irish identity was either represented by the Anglo-Irish Protestant minority (to which he belonged), but mainly by Catholic identity, especially the majority of middle-class Catholicism which Yeats despised. In this period the role of Catholicism increased, and even members of Young Ireland, a predominantly Protestant movement, acknowledged that it was a 'socially and culturally fundamental fact for the majority of Ireland's people'[32] and thus the identification of Catholicism with political interests[33] was inevitable. On the other hand, as Brown argues, 'whatever degree of opportunity the post-Parnellite period had in fact offered to déraciné Irish Protestants like Yeats, to assume a leading role in national life, was now swiftly diminishing'.[34] Although present in the discourses of both groups, yet prevailing among Protestant members,[35] folklore narrative could not be accepted as an alternative to the religious identity, an idea which Yeats appeared to have been championing in these plays. With the Easter Rising in 1916, but chiefly with Irish independence in 1922, only after national identity turbulences partially stabilised, and both national identity (especially the idea of an *Irish* identity, not Catholic Irish or Anglo-Irish) and folklore gained institutional recognition[36], first by the Folklore of Ireland Society in 1926, then by The Irish Folklore Institute in 1930 and the Irish Folklore Commission in 1936[37] since it could provide a better sense of "authenticity" and affirmation of common roots than religious identity. Hence, although religious identity in Ireland largely overlapped and was, to a certain extent, a complete substitute for the concept of ethno-cultural identity until the beginning of the twentieth century, the subsequent institutionalisation of folklore allowed the Celtic background to assume an important role in providing an "authentic" national narrative and exist alongside religious identity, thus providing the common "genuine" cultural basis that could create the

[32]Flynn, M. K., *Ideology, Mobilization and the Nation: The Rise of Irish, Basque and Carlist Nationalist Movements in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p.65.
[33] Ibid., p.58.
[34] Brown, Terence, *The Life of W. B. Yeats: A Critical Biography* (Malden, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), p.129.
[35] C.f. footnote 48.
[36] McLean, Stuart John, *The Event and Its Terrors: Ireland, Famine, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p.21.
[37] Dorson, M. Richard, *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), p.221.

historical memory and reconstruct the ethno-history in which the shameful past could be forgotten.[38]

William Butler Yeats: An Exemplary Case of the Transitoriness of the Politics and Ideology which Determine Canon Formation

The nationality of Ireland is in her songs and her stories, and in her chronicles and in her traditions, and in this nationality can be ever present with the exile as with those at home…[39]

William Butler Yeats in a letter to the Revd J.K. Fielding, (1901)

The historical circumstances that produced the intricately complex narrative of Irish national identity can be traced primarily in the consequences that Ireland suffered from the English subjugation, but also in the internal ideological differences subsequently generated by the Irish [40], although the ethno-religious nationalism in Ireland, according to Smith, occurred in the age of nationalism in Europe.[41] At the end of the nineteenth century, although Protestants were representatives of the establishment, according to Flynn, after the Great Famine of 1841, the 'role of Catholicism in relation to nationalism was also increased by the rising influence of institutional Catholicism'[42] and it was the political, rather than the cultural engagement that the Church assumed in the social life in Ireland which, in fact, defined the Catholic discourse and accordingly, enhanced the impact on the political solutions that regarded the establishment of national self-government. Nevertheless, the latent question, as observed by Paul Bew, always persisted: 'was Irish nationalism capable of being more than simply the expression of the

[38] C.f. the phenomenon of souperism further in this chapter.
[39] *The Collected Letters of Y.B. Yeats, Volume Three 1901-1904*, ed. by Kelly, John and Schuchard, Ronald (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p.108.
[40] For practical reasons I shall only focus on the socio-historical context that is relevant to this study.
[41] *National Identity*, p.49.
[42] *Ideology, Mobilization and the Nation*, p.63.

grievances of the Irish Catholic democracy'[43] and was the only identification of the Irish marked as Catholic?

The period around 1890s (when Yeats wrote *The Countess* and *The Land*), and later, in the early 1900s, according to Bew, is known as the new nationalism. It was 'increasingly exclusive, introspective and intolerant'[44] and was manifested in the two opposing conceptions at that time: the Parnellite, that 'tended to seek reconciliation with southern Protestant unionists and landlord opinion as the best route to Irish self-government'[45] and the radical agrarian that emphasised 'the need for renewed struggle and conflict with the traditional opponents of the home rule'.[46] At this period Yeats was already a prominent figure in the Celtic revival, a movement whose aim was to give validity to the "genuine" Irish identity, attempting to trace Irish roots in the past before Catholicism was established in Ireland. The Celtic revival inspired admiration for folklore almost as an alternative religion and most certainly as a new identity marker. As Yeats 'had based much of his work on the premise that folklore was the source of universal wisdom and a treasury of racial dignity',[47] he kept distance from the prevailing religious Catholic identity. For Yeats, who descended from the Irish Protestant tradition, the movement was a personal justification for his nationalism and perhaps grievance due to the Anglo-Irish declining influences in Ireland.[48] However, since in this period Yeats's nationalism was still overtly cultural, rather than political, he felt trapped between the political forces that dominated the Irish scene. Thus, around 1901 he wrote to Lady Gregory that the Catholic priests and especially the nationalist D.P. Moran who claimed that '"Celtic note" [was] one of the most glaring frauds that the credulous Irish people

[43] Bew, Paul, *Conflict and Conciliation in Ireland 1898-1910: Parnellites and Radical Agrarians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p.7.
[44] Ibid., p.6.
[45] Ibid.., p.7.
[46] Ibid., p.7.
[47] Frazier Adrian, *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Hornimen and the Struggle for the Abbey Theatre* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1990), p. 28.
[48] Foster, John Wilson in *Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival: A Challenging Art,* argues that the romantic notion of the vanishing folklore accorded with the self-image of the Anglo-Irish from whom the folklorists mainly drew their important figures, since they were also becoming members of one endangered species, and therefore stressed the regenerative power of folklore (pp. 205-206).

ever swallowed'[49] did not like him 'because of his "heterodox" mysticism, and […] the men of the Ascendency Constitutional Club[50] did not like him because they suspected him of revolutionary designs: too Protestant for one group, too Irish for the other'.[51] Additionally, discussing the centrality of Catholicism, Cairns and Richards point out that Yeats's Fenian mentor John O'Leary advised him that he could enjoy success in Ireland only if he has either the Fenians or the Church upon his side, yet that it was most certain that he will never have the Church,[52] although they express their doubts that Fenianism could have been politically so powerful to act as its counter.

Yeats experienced the first literary conflict with Catholicism upon the staging of *The Countess Cathleen*, a play which illustrates his vision of the salvation of Ireland, yet only in a form of a sacrifice of a (Catholic) leader. It is a play based on a folk tale in which the Irish peasants sell their soul to two demons, and in order to redeem them, the Countess offers her own soul in return. The unfavourable reception of the play on its first performance in May 1899 furthered the controversies which accused Yeats of heresy and proclaimed the play as anti-Irish. His intentions to celebrate the Countess' sacrifice for the whole Irish nation were perceived as an attack on the Irish, i.e. Catholic identity, thus questioning Yeats's "true Irishness". The reactions like 'A libel on Ireland', 'We never sold our faith' or 'No Irish woman ever did it'[53] alluded to the representation of the Irish Catholics as traitors and infidels that sold their souls for gold. Furthermore, Yeats makes clear references to the time and space of Irish reality, depicting times when Ireland was struck by a great famine, an allusion to the Great Famine which ravaged Ireland, and resulted in the deaths of about one million Irishmen between 1845 and 1851.[54] It was a traumatic reminiscence which caused even greater sensitivity to the issue of identity as it

[49] Cairns, David and Richards, Shaun, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester [England]; New York: Manchester University Press; New York: Distributed exclusively in the USA and Canada by St. Martin's Press, 1988), p.68.
[50] Constitutional clubs denied Catholics the right to enter the British parliament.
[51] *Behind the Scenes*, p.44.
However, after 1907, the year Synge's The Playboy of the Western World had its premiere, Yeats began to turn his attention away from Irish-speaking peasantry to the Anglo-Irish gentry. [c.f. Castle, Gregory *Modernism and the Celtic revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)].
[52] *Writing Ireland*, p.68.
[53] Scatasta, Gino *Il teatro di Yeats e il nazionalismo irlandese (1890 – 1910),*(Bologna: Patron Editore, 1996). , p. 38.
[54] Brewster, Scott and Crossman, Virginia, "Re-writing the Famine, Witnessing in crisis" in *Ireland in Proximity, History, Gender, Space*, (London and New York: Routlege, 1999).

was explored in, as it was thought, a negative context. In addition, as Howes suggests, the trade of souls for gold was:

> intimately connected with the history and mythology of souperism, a term invoking the alleged proselytizing activities of Protestants who ran soup kitchens in times of famine; peasants who converted in exchange for material gain or mere sustenance were labelled soupers. In the *Spirit of the Nation* volumes, selling one's soul for gold meant selling it to the English by working for the government or in the army.[55]

Therefore Yeats did not undermine the seriousness of the implications of the growth of souperism into common phenomenon and, in the play, peasants' willingness to invite the demons (the epitome of the English) signifies the Irish Catholic responsibility for their country's betrayal: 'Whatever you are that walk the woods at night […] I welcome you',[56] says one of them. Additionally, the trade of souls for gold also refers to 'the Irish complicity in colonisation, in particular for the Act of Union'[57] which was passed through bribery, and which directly affected the image of Ireland and its internal involvement in the colonisation.

However, the attitude toward *The Countess Cathleen,* which never received the same attention as on its premiere and subsequently became a success,[58] changed with the partial diminishment of the identity crisis after the failed Easter Rising in 1916. Namely, Hugh Kearney argues that 'the Irish nation-state took shape claiming roots in the past'[59] and with independence in 1922, the political situation enabled, to a certain extent, reconciliation with the painful issues in the past. Thus, the subsequent performances of the play suggest no further controversies and nowadays the play is still actively staged.

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[55] Howes, Marjorie, *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class and Irishness*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 48
[56] *The Countess Cathleen*, p.31.
[57] *Yeats's Nations,* p.48.
[58] *Behind the Scenes,* p.19.
[59] Kearney, Hugh F., *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 2nd edition), p.281.

The Land of Heart's Desire, as Ernst Boyd suggests in *Ireland's Literary Renaissance*, complements its predecessor, *The Countess Cathleen*, for the reason that 'it illustrates the strain of paganism which is as surely a part of Celtic folklore as the piety of which the former play is an expression'.[60] The play does not rely on one particular source, but as Birgit Bramsbäck suggests, it employs the idea of a luring away of a newly-married bride used in numerous folk tales.[61]

Given that unlike *The Countess Cathleen* it does not aim its direct criticism towards the English rule and could not be considered as an ideological threat to England, its first production at the Avenue Theatre in London, on 29 March 1894, could not have been obstructed in the first place. In addition, it was funded by an Englishwoman, Annie Horniman, a patron of the arts with an extraordinary passion for theatre, whose name Yeats had concealed from the public due to the fact that he refused to be labelled as a collaborator with the English. However, the story of the opening at the Avenue Road Theatre did not have a happy ending either. On the contrary, as Michael McAteer claims, it turned into a debacle, not only because the audience ridiculed the play, but because it received negative reviews from the critics as well. Furthermore, McAteer argues that 'the main complaint against the play was that it was too simple in style and diction, too alien to a thespian tradition of theatricality.[62] *The Bookman Review* in the review of June 1894 stated that 'whether it could ever be successfully put on stage is doubtful, but certainly only under conditions which do not exist on our stage today',[63] pointing to the inconsistency and mutability even of the acquired standards for "taste". Hence, all the criticism was aimed toward the stylistic aspects of the play. However, it was evident that *The Land of Heart's Desire* could not assume any level of socio-cultural significance and could not spark off further socio-cultural debate in the English intellectual circles due to the fact that the issue of Irish identity as it was represented in the play was not a matter of their concern. On the other hand, the circumstances in Ireland regarded it as 'too

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[60] Boyd, Ernst A., *Ireland's Literary Renaissance* (Dublin and London: Manusel & Company, 1916), p.148.
[61] Bramsbäck, Birgit, *Folklore and W.B. Yeats: the Function of Folklore Elements in Three Early Plays*, (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1984), p.27.
[62] McAteer, Michael, '"Stranger in the House": Alienation and History in *The Land of Heart's Desire* and *Cathleen ni Houlihan*' in *Irish Theatre in England*, ed. by Cave, Richard and Levitas, Ben (Dublin: A Carysfort Press Book, 2007), p. 41.
[63] Pierce, David ed., W.*B. Yeats: Critical Assessments* (Mountfield: Helm Information, 2000), p.163.

dangerously unorthodox for production'.[64] As MacHenzie states 'in the strictures on Yeats's work quoted in Father Stephan Brown's *Guide to Books on Ireland*, *The Land of Heart's Desire* is referred to as a "revolting burlesque of Catholic religion"'.[65] Namely, Yeats's idea to introduce the priest, Father Hart, who, seduced by the supernatural powers of the Fairy Child removes the crucifix from the house, was rejected as deplorable. Despite the fact that the Bruin family, Maurteen, Bridget, and their son Shawn, Mary's husband, are represented as good Christians, and Mary's mother-in-law strongly disapproves of Mary's obsession with the world of fairies, Yeats's sympathy with Mary's enchantment with the supernatural gives the play strong anti-Catholic overtones. Even her death in which her soul transforms into a white bird, remains as a finale in which her body is left as worthless, material existence in the earthly Catholic world is portrayed as an act of freedom.

However, the positive reception which *The Land* received in America in 1901 encouraged the theatre producers to reconsider its staging in Ireland, hoping that perhaps the play could be produced in Ireland with a better outcome as well. Presuming that the contrast between the hostile reception that the play received in London in 1894 and the warm reception in America resulted from the 'significant Irish American presence within East Coast and Chicago audiences',[66] Frank Fay, an actor and one of the co-founders of the Abbey Theatre, in an article on *The Land* published in *The United Irishman* in May 1901, claimed that Yeats's plays might have 'a special appeal for Irish audience and that Yeats should direct his future compositions towards such an audience'.[67] However, yet again, in 1903 it was the Fay brothers who rejected its production on 'religious grounds'.[68]

After years of rejection, on 16 February 1911, the play was first performed by the Irish National Theatre Society Limited at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.[69] In 1916, five years after its first performance, one of the first major article in praise of the play was

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[64] *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats: 1905-1907 vol IV*, edited by John Kelly, Ronald Schuchard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p.865.
[65] MacHenzie, Norman H. 'Hopkins, Yeats, and Dublin in the Eighties' in *Myth and Reality in Irish Literature*, ed. by Ronsley, Joseph, (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977), p. 91.
[66] "Stranger in the House", p.40.
[67] Ibid., p.40.
[68] Mikhail, E.H. ed., *The Abbey Theatre: Interviews and Recollections* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p.27.
[69] Miller, Liam, *The Noble Drama of W.B. Yeats*, (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1977).

published by Ernst Boyd. His positive overview turns into apologia of Yeats's artistic and patriotic expression and an attack on the hostility that was expressed by 'contemporary objectors who professed to be horrified that the crucifix should be removed by the Priest at the request of the Pagan child'[70]. In the same manner, he adds that the outrage was caused by 'the same primitive moralists who raised an outcry against *The Countess Cathleen*, on the grounds that the selling of Cathleen's soul to the demons was heresy and a libel upon Irish people'.[71] Additionally, the rise of Yeats's reputation after he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in December 1923, partly for 'his giving a voice to the soul of a people, an evaluation which refers to his entire work, plays included'[72] resulted in further performances and publishing of *The Land of Heart's Desire*, with an outstanding popularity in 1925 when a separate edition of the play 'sold ten thousand copies'.[73]

Although Yeats's place in the Irish canon nowadays is quite secure due to the socio-cultural and political significance of his works, and critics increasingly acknowledge his plays, as Bramsbäck has pointed out,[74] there were several attempts to discredit his canonicity. Thus Irish critic Daniel Corkery harshly attacked Yeats in his book *Synge and the Anglo-Irish Literature* (1931), because he was unable to express what Ireland really stood for: 'it failed to do so completely, since it could not give a voice to Irish Catholic experience […] Yeats was neither English nor really Irish, thus "unable to speak the secret things in the nation's soul"'.[75] Additionally, certain Irish intellectuals such as Cruise O'Brien, Deane, Kiberd, Kearney, active in *The Crane Bag*,[76] a political and cultural journal published between 1977 and 1985, have also taken a very negative attitude to Yeats's work arguing that Yeats created a picture of an imaginary Ireland, seeing in him a writer whose nationalistic drive pushed him into inventing a mythology

[70] *Ireland's Literary Renaissance*, p.150.
[71] Ibid., p.150.
[72] Bramsbäck, Birgit, 'Yeats and the "Bounty of Sweden"' in *Yeats the European*, ed. by Jeffares, Alexander Norman, (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1989), p. 99.
[73] "Stranger in the House", p.41.
[74] 'Yeats and the "Bounty of Sweden"', p.99.
[75] Allison, Jonathan, 'The Attack on Yeats', *South Atlantic Review, 55:4,* (Nov., 1990), pp.61-62, < http://www.jstor.org/stable/3200446>, [accessed: 03/04/2010].
[76] *Yeats's Political Identities.*

of make-believe Irish identity. Treating the concept of identity as a product of social and political forces, they consider Yeats's reinvention of the past to be fruitless, and see the social significance of his work only as a replacement of one ideology with another.

However, this criticism did not manage to diminish Yeats's role in Irish society. In fact, the public tends to accept Yeats as the bridge that brings all the Irish people together. As the postcolonial theorist Edward Said put it, referring mainly to his later artistic production: 'Yeats, despite his "settled presence" in the canon of English literature, "present[s] another fascinating aspect: that of the indisputably great national poet who articulates the experiences, the aspirations, and the vision of a people suffering under the dominion of an offshore power'.[77] Accordingly, Yeats is accepted as a *de facto* great Irish national writer, whose works instigate Irish national identity juxtaposing it to their oppressors – the English since the politics that 'Yeats expected would do him and his theatre "more good than harm" were the extreme anti-British politics'.[78] For that reason Frazier supports Denis Donoghue's claims that Yeats enhanced his works by giving them a backdrop of history of his nation and a cast of noble-looking figures[79] in order to make them more acceptable and that Yeats's success lent itself to his activities and discourses which excited interest in his work 'through being fashionable, controversial, or somehow relevant'.[80] Additionally, his increased popularity with Irish immigrants in America contributed to his status in Ireland as well, and after he was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature he became an acclaimed writer, nowadays part of the literature curriculum at schools and universities, his figure being associated with the positive values of Irish society and especially Irish national identity.

[77] McMullen, Kim, 'Imagining Ireland: R.F. Foster's W.B. Yeats: A Life and the 'New' Irish Renaissance', *The Kenyon Review, New Series, 21: 2*, (1999), p. 142, < http://www.jstor.org/stable/4337895>, [accessed: 29/11/2009].
[78] *Behind the Scenes*, p. 25.
[79] Ibid., p. 23.
[80] Ibid. p.22.

Goran Stefanovski: Retelling the Discourse of the Macedonian Social Context

> *What is a story?* A story is a narrative. An account. A sequence of events. It tells us who we are, who we have been, who we could become. It is an interpretation. Like identity, which is also a story of who we think we are, a constant negotiation and renegotiation of self. […]
>
> Who is in charge of these narratives, anyway? They are written by civil servants in various ministries of education. […]These master narratives create the social context and intellectual discourse in which an artist operates. They are the centrifugal forces of society and culture. The artist can take it or leave it, but the context is there. Like gravity.

Goran Stefanovski, *Tales from the Wild East*[81]

The introduction of Stefanovski as a representative of the Macedonian national canon will be significantly different from the one about Yeats since no controversies form part of his canonical status. Instead, before approaching the analysis of the plays in the following three chapters in which both the authors will be treated comparatively, in this chapter I shall focus on the origin of the concept of Macedonian national identity. Discussing the social narrative of its crisis as well as folklore as a strong element which creates and maintains historical memory and gives a sense of authenticity to the nation, I shall introduce Stefanovski as a playwright who deals with that given context.

The history of modern Macedonia is overburdened with many issues regarding the national identity of the Macedonians. Unlike Ireland that was dominated by one external colonial power, in Macedonia its complexity arose from various powers that claimed the rights to the region. The core impetus for the creation of an independent

[81] Stefanovski, Goran, *Prikazni od diviot istok*, (Skopje: Tabernakul, 2005), p. 70-72. English translation made available by the courtesy of the author (© Goran Stefanovski, 18 Martyrs Field Road, Canterbury, CT1 3PT, Great Britain).

Macedonian nation-state which occurred with the rise of the national awareness was made under the influence of the nationalistic trend in Europe in the nineteenth century, and had its background in the revolutionary activities that were organized for the liberation from the Ottoman rule. Several unsuccessful uprisings were staged, and the territory of what was known as Macedonia in those days, after the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, was partitioned among Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria, the territory of the present-day Macedonia remaining under the rule of Serbia. In 1944 Macedonia became one of the six constituent republics within the framework of the Yugoslav federation; however it gained its complete independence after the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991.

Centuries of tailoring of the territories on the Balkans and negotiation of various national narratives had a huge impact on the creation of the discourse which gave rise to present-day Macedonian national identity. At the beginning of the twentieth century not only the Ottomans, but also the Serbs, the Bulgarians and the Greeks, whose aspirations for the Macedonian territory increased as the Ottoman power slowly declined, made use of their positions attempting to assume control over the narrative of national identity by producing their own discourse. Presenting their side of the identity narrative, they disputed the existence of a separate Macedonian nation on that territory, obliterating it entirely. Consequently, at the end of the nineteenth century the offered data of the population on the territory of Macedonia were 'completely different depending on who published them'[82]:

	Bulgarian Claims	Serbian Claims	Greek Claims	Ottoman Census Figures
Turks (Muslim)	499	231000	634000	1112000
Bulgarians	1181000	57000	332000	774000

[82] Maxwell, Alexander, 'Slavic Macedonian Nationalism: From "Regional" to "Ethnic"' in *Region, Regional Identity and Regionalism in Southeastern Europe* Vol. 1, ed. by Roth, Claus and Brunnbauer, Ulf (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007), p.130.

Greeks	229000	201000	653000	514000
Serbs	1000	2048000	-	-

Figure 1: Claims to Macedonia's population using "Ottoman Statistics"[83]

Although the manipulation of the population figures of the people who in fact declared themselves as Macedonians, but were neglected in the census and the statistics, are not important to this study, they demonstrate the manner in which nations can be invented and reinvented, created and obliterated, depending on the context and the need for their existence. Nonetheless, before it could be disputed, the idea of a Macedonian identity was already constructed, as Svetlana Boym observes: 'invented tradition does not mean a creation ex nihilo or a pure act of social constructivism; rather it builds on the sense of loss of community and cohesiveness'.[84] Thus, the attempts for its destruction implied intensification both of the identity crisis and efforts for its reinvention by means of introducing socio-cultural narratives. With regard to folklore, they began in the nineteenth century with the intensification of the intellectual activities of folklore collectors; persisted at the beginning of the twentieth century when 'Macedonian identity, Macedonianism, was a product of attachment to their homeland, identification with its language and folklore',[85] and achieved full recognition after 1944 when the official nation-state provided means for its institutionalization. In this regard, Dona Kolar-Panov quotes Tome Sazdov who in *Macedonian Folk Literature* argues that the denial of the literate (non-institutionalized) use of the language before 1944 'led to the development of mainly oral culture […] in the form of folklore'.[86]

In the period of a relative political independence within the Yugoslav federation (1944-1991) when every political decision was controlled and dictated from Belgrade,

[83] Ibid. NB The figure is taken from Justin McCarthy's *The Ottoman Peoples and the End of Empire*, in order to illustrate how much the various statistics varied from one dispenser of information to another.
[84] *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 42.
[85] Rossos, Andrew, *Macedonia and the Macedonians: A History* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2008), p. 165.
[86] Kolar-Panov Dona, *Video, War and the Diasporic Imagination* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p.49.

Macedonian policy was at least liberated from the Greek and Bulgarian political propaganda and since the use of the Macedonian language was not disputed, traditions, customs and folklore were transmitted without restraint. Namely, as Andrew Rossos stated: 'as long as they did not question Titoist doctrine and Macedonia's status, they were free and could help develop a national culture'[87] and for the first time the debates about Macedonian national identity were provided by a legitimate socio-cultural marker. Given that up to 1941 'Macedonian-language culture existed only in the form of the rich folk/popular culture and in illegal and semi-legal publications',[88] due to the lack of other cultural forms tradition of folklore continued to persist. After 1944, the communist ideology in Yugoslavia was such that it overtly supported the use of folklore for nationalistic causes. Maja Brkljačić has pointed out that although at the early stage of the Second World War the role of folklore was disputed by the Communist party due to inconsistency with its style, the official recognition of folklore had to follow soon for the reasons of its not wanting

> to abandon the heroic tradition of folk epics, from which it learned to derive a significant part of the explanation of its "historical mission". Already in the early sixties, the League of Yugoslav Communists saw before its eyes the revival of folklore performances, much to the discomfort of some older members. All the same, folklore […] became an integral and incontestable part of everyday life in Yugoslavia.[89]

Therefore, approved by the Party, folklore legitimately became the distinctive trademark of each of the republics of the country. Accordingly, the emerging Macedonian cultural productions seemed almost indebted to preserve and transmit the traditions that enabled their outset, in order not only to honour the "authentic" past from which they derived, but also to validate their own existence in the present, thus continuing its life in the contemporary culture. In this regard, I would interpret Kolar-Panov's comment (with

[87] *Macedonia and the Macedonians,* p. 250.
[88] Ibid., p.249.
[89] Brkljačić, Maja, 'Popular Culture and Communist Ideology: Folk Epics in Tito's Yugoslavia' in *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, ed. by Lampe, John, and Mazower, Mark (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), p.182.

the previous note on the language) that oral basis is perhaps the basis for the specific genres of ethnic videos with Macedonian folklore sketches and fairy tales, nowadays recorded both for children and adults, tapes of performances of local folklore groups and folk music,[90] as a remark that the popularity and presence of folklore in various cultural productions is a signal of the social importance attached to folklore even in the present-day Macedonian society.

Goran Stefanovski emerged as a playwright in a social context in which folklore elements were openly sustained and national and historical significance was attached to their preservation. His career began in 1974 when his first play *Yane Zadrogaz* was performed in Dramski Theatre in Skopje. This play (a folk fantasia with singing) based solely on folkloric material - stories, poems, proverbs, sayings, curses and blessings - taken from the work of the Macedonian collector of folklore Marko Tsepenkov (1829-1920), marked the beginning of his subsequent work and revealed the main source of Stefanovski's inspiration. The play was received with acclaim, and the most prestigious Macedonian journals and literary magazines published their reviews in which his capacity and genius to balance the Macedonian contemporary reality with its tradition, drawing on folklore as the most important and distinctive element of the Macedonian nation which attest its longevity, creative force and authenticity, was pompously praised. These reviews from national newspapers like *Nova Makedonija, Razgledi, Vecher and NIN* [91] played a crucial role, and were also published as an opening or a postscript to most of the printed editions of his plays. Some of them, like Petre Bakevski's review in *Vecher* from 28th December, 1974, [92] are so passionate in their account that they refer to folklore as an element which bears witness to the spirit of the Macedonian people that was never crushed or silenced despite all the threats, sufferings, slavery or hardship they had gone through. This victimization is quite typical when it comes to the description of the character of the Macedonian nation. In fact, it helps to create a picture of an identity that was destabilized by external factors, yet nearly always overcome by the spiritual strength of the people.

[90] *Video, War and the Diasporic Imagination*, p.49.
[91] Stefanovski, Goran, *Yane Zadrogaz, Divo meso*, (Skopje: Misla, 1981).
[92] Ibid. pp. 127-128.

Considering the historical circumstances, as well as the efforts of intellectuals to present such an identity built on stories from the past emphasizing the fact that folklore needs to be cherished and nurtured, it is not difficult to imagine that Stefanovski was going to exploit the subjects he was exposed to. His adaptation of the archaic language, the use of folk stories, beliefs or poems, is largely appreciated because of the social significance and the value that their reiteration carries in the contemporary context. Thus, folklore has been depicted not only as a vessel that transmits the past and reflects ancestors' wisdom, but also as a heritage that should be sustained and constantly reproduced as a pillar of the nation's pride. In this framework, Stefanovski maintains that each story of identity was born in a different historical, social and cultural context, and is therefore authentic. Therefore, his characters endowed with positive values always embody "authentic" Macedonian personas whose strengths and weaknesses lie in their spirituality, immateriality, and, above all, their idealism, and without exception each of them is original in their own way. The function of folklore in his works reinforces this assumed authenticity and to enhance the presumed cultural and national uniqueness.

Consequently, Stefanovski's has always been welcomed with warm reception, and despite the criticism he employs towards Macedonian society and its social system, his clear and frequent references to national identity spared his works from controversy and both *Proud Flesh* (1979) and *The Black Hole* (1987) received immediate acclaim and positive reviews. Macedonian critics have focused on the function of the use of folklore as a representation of the national identity and the unanimity of praise and lack of negative criticism among critics and reviewers signals that their reproduction is recognised as social value that is nurtured in Macedonian intellectual circles and as such furthered through the canon. Additionally, Aleksiev claims, Stefanovski is eulogised for his brilliant portrayal not only of the well-known Macedonian suffering and gloominess, but also of the exploration and modulation of the soul of his own people.[93]

Nowadays, Stefanovski's canonical status is assuming even greater importance due to the fact that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Macedonian identity, still disturbed and unstable, has reached the peak of its crisis. The disputes with Bulgaria over

[93] Aleksiev, Aleksandar 'Let kon sonceto i slobodata' in *Let vo Mesto*, Stefanovski, Goran (Skopje: Misla, 1982), pp.117-118.

the claims of certain historical events and figures,[94] as well as the question over the Macedonian language, but above all the question of the Macedonian minority in both Bulgaria and Greece, and especially the painful "name issue" with Greece[95] in which not only the name Macedonia, but the notion of Macedonian national identity as well, is disputed by the Greeks ever since the Macedonian independence in 1991, contribute to a social context which is in demand of more powerful identity markers. Therefore, the demand for cultural testimonies that maintain the tradition and confirm the importance of the national cultural heritage, as well as enable its future continuation, has significantly increased.

Considered to be the best Macedonian writer, Stefanovski's plays have been staged and performed more than by any other Macedonian contemporary playwrights. He is also the most awarded Macedonian writer who has won numerous prestigious national, as well as international prizes. At the age of 52 he became a member of MANU – the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, therefore, officially becoming the most acclaimed playwright in Macedonia. Furthermore, being on the obligatory reading list of the curriculum for Macedonian literature in high schools (represented by *Proud Flesh*) and at universities, Stefanovski's place in the canon for the time being remains undisturbed, this institutionalisation preserving and enabling transmission of his works. He is a member of the Macedonian PEN Centre and The Writer's Society of Macedonia, and became an honorary ambassador of the Macedonian culture in London in 2007, where he is 'retelling the story of the Macedonian people in Great Britain',[96] thus assuming another high position in the hierarchy of identity politics, as the official note from the Macedonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs states: 'An Ambassador of Culture has a diplomatic status and their engagement is on the voluntary basis without any compensation. Their noble and patriotic mission is promotion of the Macedonian culture to the world public'.[97]

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[94] Notable historical figures like St Clement in the ninth century and many revolutionaries and poets from the period of the Macedonian national awakening in the nineteenth and until the mid-twentieth century.
[95] For further refernce consult Danforth, Loring M., *The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic Nationalism in a Translational World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).
[96] <http://www.kultura.gov.mk/ambasadori_goran_stefanovski.php> [accessed 13/07/2010].
[97] <http://www.culture.in.mk/story.asp?id=20753&rub> [accessed 23/04/2011].

III. Longing as Belonging: Folklore as Nostalgic Element and its Role in Validation of the National Identity

Nostalgia … is essentially history without guilt. Heritage is something that suffuses us with pride rather than with shame.
Michael Kammen

Dinosaurs are ideal animals for the nostalgia industry since nobody remembers them.
Svetlana Boym

The concept of nostalgia that Svetlana Boym analyses in *The Future of Nostalgia*, especially its susceptibility to fabrication that allows total restoration of the narrative mainly because of its intangibility and distance in time, can be closely related to the notion of folklore and its (re)construction. Therefore, it is not only folklore's characteristic as a past narrative, but also its inclination towards fictitiousness that makes us perceive it as a derivative of a nostalgic experience, and especially the treatment of the question of nostalgic sentiment as an illusory, false national memory, almost as the psychoanalytical notion of return to something which never existed. Namely, approaching its historical development, Boym interprets nostalgia through its transformation from a disease into 'a sign of sensibility or an expression of new patriotic feeling'[98] since the mid eighteenth century. Nostalgia is 'treated in a new genre, not as a tale of putative convalescence, but as a romance with the past […] commemorating the real and imaginary past of the new European nations'.[99] However, this nostalgia for the homeland, the one that thinks itself as truth and tradition, seeking for the return to origins, and which is at the core of national revivals[100] is not always about the past. Turning political, it takes the future into consideration and therefore has impact on everything that is forthcoming. Resembling Anderson's statement that 'If nation-states are widely conceded to be "new" and "historical," the nations to which they give political expression

[98] *The Future of Nostalgia,* p.11.
[99] Ibid..
[100] Ibid., p.41.

always loom out of immemorial past […] and glide into a limitless future'[101], nostalgia (by being linked to the processes of nation building) can be understood in its tendency to become the official memory of the nation-state. The social aspects of folklore allow us to discuss it as a reservoir of representations of this official memory, namely as an institutionalised nostalgia for the past which as a tool based on selective remembrance aids the policy of national identity formation. Or as Stefanovski's Silyan from *The Black Hole* cries:

> We want a name, a past, a future. Some kind of tradition and morality. We want to owe somebody something. We want to expect something. We want to be.[102]

The plays by Yeats and Stefanovski communicate nostalgic sentiments on different levels. While Stefanovski treats his characters as products of their past and folklore, Yeats negotiates the identity issue by establishing a direct link to imaginary folkloric spatial and temporal categories. Therefore, his early plays explore his interest in folklore and oral literature as a nostalgic form of expression reflecting at the same time his desire to belong to another, new Ireland, as well as to create a reality different from the one in which he was living. This essentialist idea that produced an idealised depiction of identity derived from Yeats's understanding of the Celtic heritage as a narrative that would introduce a distinction between the Irish and the English in the first place. Additionally, it was expected that this idea would reinvent the past in order to create a new future, not solely in opposition to the utilitarian English rule, but as a form of a different cultural domination as well. The romantic quest for the heroic past that emphasized the rural simplicity of life and virtues of the Irish peasants, the identification with people that lived in a pre-modern area not subjected to foreign influences, was a reflection of the quest for rediscovering their own ancient roots, what the age would tend to interpret as the very nature of Irishness. Furthermore, Yeats held as true that the secluded peasant regions had preserved some of the old traditional culture and the native

[101] *Imagined Communities*, pp. 11-12.
[102] Stefanovki, Goran, *The Black Hole*, (1987) p. 43. Manuscript made available by the courtesy of the author (© Goran Stefanovski, 18 Martyrs Field Road, Canterbury, CT1 3PT, Great Britain).

Irish language, and this idealised Ireland, intact, pure and original, that rejected the modernizing processes of English society, conjured up the vision of Yeats's idyllic Ireland.

The Land of Heart's Desire, a play situated in the distant past in Ireland, represents the idea of an imaginary land, a land of fairies where everyone is young and happy, where no one is troubled by death and decay, a world completely detached and indifferent to the world of humans which Yeats could identify with the mystical image of Ireland as a poetic yearning for the cradle of what he had imagined to be the authentic Irish identity. Yeats considered that his play was 'in a sense, the call of the heart, the heart seeking its own dream […]; this play is the call of country',[103] namely the call of Ireland. As Kiberd has suggested, 'Ireland, for him, would be an "imaginary homeland", the sort of place endlessly invented and reinvented by exiles who fear that, if they do not give it a local habitation in words, it may entirely disappear'.[104] Kiberd's notion of the nostalgic exile, however, had a different sense in Yeats's reality: not only can it refer to the first performance of the play in London which represented a symbolic expulsion of Yeats's idea of cultural nationalism from Ireland, but also the physical exile of the Irish immigrants in America to whom this play appealed. Namely, the warm reception among the Irish, mainly Catholic community, in America in 1901 suggests that despite the play's anti-Catholic overtones nostalgia among the immigrants redefines the recognition of literature that deals with identity issues and that it acts as a mechanism which accelerates the official acclaim.

For Yeats personally, this escapist idea of a romanticized nostalgia for some distant, undefined imaginary place and time seemed to have offered a space in which folkloric magical pre-colonial Ireland would restore itself, remaining undisturbed or threatened. This pagan world, symbolizing pre-Christian Ireland, and the sympathetic attitude that Yeats takes towards Mary and her decision to abandon the earthly life can be interpreted as Yeats's longing for an imagined identity freed from both English colonisation as well as the Catholic narratives. Although not as persistently as in *The Land*, through the character of the bard Aleel who invites the Countess to join him in the

[103] Jeffares, Alexander Norman and Knowland, A.S., *A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats*, (Stanford: Stanford Univeristy Press, 1975), p.28.
[104] Kiberd, Declan, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), p.99.

idyllic land in which her sorrows, and thus, Irish sorrows, will be forgotten, Yeats explores this nostalgic escapism in *The Countess* as well.

Restoring the aspects of what he conceived as the original Irish cultural values and instructing the Irish how to maintain what he considered to be their genuine cultural heritage, thus preventing the penetration of a culture which was not their own, was a task Yeats believed he had to undertake. The first step towards achieving this ambition was to approach large audiences by emphasising folklore's social significance by means of its institutionalisation. Although the lack of formal education of Irish folk was the major obstacle in using education as a main approach, Yeats, alongside other Irish intellectuals, initiated the idea of publishing a series of books on history and legends of their native country. Nevertheless, the project did not produce the expected results and the subsequent idea, the establishment of a truly Irish national theatre, was born as a solution which was to achieve the same effect without demanding too much effort on the part of the uneducated folk. Yeats imagined the theatre to be a medium which, just like literary education, would convey his voice to public, yet as a more powerful means of restoring the lost origins and identity. This deliberate shift towards theatre rather than the printed word points to the fact that identity policies require compromise on the choice of genre, and that the theatre as a social space brings together various factors that contribute to a more powerful reception of literature. Or, as Frazier claims:

> Literature, however, arises not just from the author but from the entire human struggle for power through articulation – more specifically, in the case of literature of the stage, from the actors who raise the text to life, the audiences in whom it takes shape, the patrons who foster it, and all the economic and political stresses in which it is lodged.[105]

The theatre is thus a social space in which the artistic and social activities and representations can be controlled according to the social context that additionally influences the performance and understanding of a play. Theatre functions through images and it

[105] *Behind the Scenes*, p.XV.

> cannot occur in an empty space. From this perspective socially transformed space is understood to be a "container", but […] not simply a container of "things". It is argued by Henri Lefebvre that what it contains is its "relations of production" and "relations of reproduction". Here the social space in which the images occur is itself a conjunction of political relations. It is not neutral space […] but manifestly organized by the dominant relations of production.[106]

Signifying a more potent method of expression, theatre as an institution gave folklore a sense of legitimacy, thus opening up a new way of functioning of the mechanisms of nostalgia.

If Yeats intentionally decided to write for the theatre, Stefanovski, so to say, grew up in a theatrical context. His father, a stage director, and his mother an actress, at an early age he inevitably came to know that theatrical images and representations exercise an enormous power over the individual as well the collective. The performances that he watched, and the folklore materials by Marko Tsepenkov that he was exposed to, played a decisive role in his career. His appreciation for tradition and folklore, thus, does not derive directly from nationalistic nostalgia, nor, he claims, are they an explicit manifestation of patriotic feeling,[107] but rather, the sensitivity with which they were treated and nurtured as an expression of the Macedonian national cultural heritage. Thus, unlike Yeats, Stefanovski is not yearning for some distant, imaginary folkloric past. Yet, accepting as true that it is a vital, subconsciously incorporated component of a person's character and thus, unavoidably acts as a core structure that defines the individual as well as collective mentality and identity, he inevitably accepts the reiteration of the mythical past, thus generating nostalgic sentiments. In the same manner, the reconstruction of folklore, that for Stefanovski implies the inescapability of becoming other than a figure from the social mould and his understanding of culture, and thus implicitly of folklore

[106] Read, Alan, *Theatre and Everyday Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p.146.
[107] *Prikazni od Diviot Istok.*

narrative, as part of an 'accurate, strong, authentic story',[108] signify the nostalgic character of his plays that crave for something as illusory as the notion of authenticity. Furthermore, Stefanovski views the past cultural narratives as elements which should not be questioned, as the character of the mother in *The Black Hole* after retelling the folk story about Silyan the Stork confirms: 'And so it was, God's truth, my child. You may not believe it, but I surely do, for it was told by my grandfather and great-grandfather, too'.[109] In that regard, not only do we infer it from his plays, but also from various essays and interviews in which he explicitly reveals his attitude towards folklore as cultural heritage: 'You don't choose your cultural heritage. You get it in a bundle. It's a subconscious part of your being and it can't be subjected to any comments'.[110]

Consequently, this nostalgia that can be traced in the portrayal of the characters' mentality is paradoxically reproduced in the process of its dismantling; his characters that evoke the ancestors' wisdom and the patterns of behaviour are reinvented in each new character and with each new story, thus repeatedly reconstructing the existing narrative of tradition. His plays are also nostalgic not only because they rely on folklore as their constitutive element thus employing characters that are products of something that presumes existence in the past, but mainly because of their inability to accept that past, due to which they become uneasy about their own existence in the present. Thus, yearning for something different and in constant quest for their identities, they are trapped in some vague crisis-generated nostalgia. In addition, the nostalgic also dwells in his depiction that blurs the line between fact and fiction. Reciprocally, this gives the narrative a touch of truth which further on instigates the creation of the element of authenticity in the identity discourse. As a result, the mechanisms of interexchange between literary narrative and historical facts become active and productive.

Stefanovski's *The Black Hole*, illustrates this fusion of the elements of reality and fiction, both on a narrative and structural level. Basing it on a folk story about Silyan the Stork, taken from a collection of folk stories by Marko Tsepenkov, Stefanovski employs a character who oscillates between mythical Silyan from the folk story and the contemporary Silyan, thus representing a character torn between the past and the present.

[108] Ibid., p.15
[109] *The Black Hole*, p.33.
[110] *Prikazni od Diviot Istok*, p.99.

Both Silyan characters are tormented by feelings of displacement representing a prototype of nostalgic characters that desperately seek for their way home. The folk story deals with a man who distances himself from his family and does not conform to the traditional familial norms and values. He spends most of his time out of the house, lives a bohemian life, and is constantly reprimanded by his parents that such a life only brings misfortune; he could, as it happened to a man once upon a time, turn into a bird and lament for everything he did when it is already too late. He does not heed the warnings, gets bored with his life, and decides to go on a pilgrimage, survives a shipwreck and finds himself in a strange waste land. Being transformed into a stork, he is doomed to spend the whole summer on the chimney of his family's house. No one recognises him, and in his apathy Silyan regrets that in his human life he ignored his parents' advice and neglected his wife and child. After plenty of vicissitudes, he turns into a human being again and comes back home retelling everyone the unbelievable story.

In Stefanovski's play, Silyan is a postmodern character who loses his job because of a "subversive act" against the communist ideology, becomes disillusioned with society which is decaying (the Macedonian social-realist system of the 1980s), and frequently leaves his home, spending the nights with different women. Silyan is that unpretentious intellectual who is embittered with reality and the people around him who are becoming increasingly materialistic and superficial. In this aspect he resembles not only the character of the father in *Proud Flesh*, but also Yeats's positive characters whose spiritual depth is antipodal to the materialistic shallowness of the intruders that threaten to destroy their identity. Accordingly, materialism represents not only the negative aspects of a culture that is treading on the established values, but its superficiality also denies the existence of that "authentic" identity whose narrative is endowed with stories of complexity, depth, morality and intellectuality. Thus, in order to detach himself from the surroundings that he despises, in the play, instead of turning into a stork, Silyan becomes invisible. Symbolising the Macedonian who is caught between his existential need to belong somewhere, but at the same time not wanting to belong to that tainted community, he becomes a representative of the identity that is in crisis, a nation in search of its roots, politically troubled, and economically impoverished. He is the Macedonian who cannot be a part of that certain period of history, yet desperately wants to find his

place, that is, his own self. Therefore, in the play, like in the story itself, after losing his identity he has an irresistible desire to go back and be able to live among his people. Stefanovski best illustrates this nostalgia with Silyan's final cry, which is, in fact, one of the soliloquies from the folk story:

> Oh mother of mine! Oh father of mine! Oh my dear little lad and my dear little lass! And you, my dear, dear wife...Will you see me in your dreams in this wasteland, with not so much as a bird singing? Oh, that I had been cut down in my prime, mother, that I had been buried in the churchyard, and you, mother, had come to my grave, to light a candle for me and give alms for the dead! But I am to die here, mother, in this wasteland. Eagles and crows shall feast on my flesh. Oh, why was your curse so dire that I am come to this? Is this bare land the underworld? Ah, woe is me, for I shall see no deliverance, no homecoming. I pray to God to take me back there once again. Oh God, grant my wish and I swear to serve Our Lady three years in the monastery. I beseech Thee, do not take my soul ere I become a man again! [111]

Additionally, when Svetle, one of Silyan's lovers in a different scene and context repeats Silyan's words that express his certainty that he hears voices 'like something that was said once before and now comes back again'[112] only this time referring to the words uttered by the invisible Silyan, implies Stefanovski's belief in the inevitability of the recurrence of the past and its consequences on the present, like the reappearance of the identity of the mythical Silyan in another context of the Macedonian culture. Moreover, the narrative technique of repetition of different lines in different circumstances evokes the idea of reproduction of culture, and especially the identity which is thus sustained: his characters repeat lines from one another in the same way that he repeats lines from the folk story.

[111] *The Black Hole*, p. 52.
[112] Ibid. p.37.

Proud Flesh, on the other hand, deals with nostalgia which is more direct in the sense that the identity crisis is more explicitly presented. Each of the characters in *Proud Flesh* experiences a crisis of their national and personal identity as they struggle with the fact that they need to overcome the fear of being what they are, despite the foreign ideology by which they are surrounded. Dimitrija, the invalid father, is the only person whose identity does not suffer due to the fact that he is not burdened with doubts about his origin, and is not disturbed by the shallow materialistic modern world that threatens to obliterate the warm world of the small traditional community. He and his delusional wife are the only ones to realize that the ideals their children are pursuing are false. Aspiring to get away from the surroundings, their son Stevo wants to cut the umbilical cord that binds him to his traditions. He pursues his ambitions and dreams about his imagined future in the materialistic world of success and superficiality. His personality is seen by the outsiders in the play, the foreigners, as identity in crisis caused by his inferiority complex due to the lack of tradition and history of his nation, which is the same discourse that Macedonian historians and politicians have used since the mid-twentieth century in order to present the victimization of the Macedonians as well as the denigration by the neighbouring countries. Thus, the only way for Stevo to deal with that is to run away from everything that connects him to such identification. He rejects the idea of being a part of the masochistic primitive Balkan mentality and aspires to be a part of the refined Western world. However, at the end of the play, when his younger brother Andreja is in prison because of his revolutionary activities, his older brother Simon is dead because of his inability to cope with the uncertainty of his life, and their house is ruined by his German boss, he rebels for the first time. Embittered by the situation caused by the ones whose ideals he wanted to attain, he fires a bullet in the air which signifies a break with his former life, and a change that brings him back to his roots again, indicating reconciliation with the past which is as immoral and tainted as the present he is forced to confront day after day.

(In)authenticity of folkore

Classification of folklore as a genuine national cultural heritage, that is, as a network of artistic creations that arise from one cultural tradition which asserts originality and authenticity, is problematic in many respects. The nation-states' claim on their own genuine past based on common shared culture and history is recognised in their creation of myths of common national past. The illusion of authentic roots, also explored by Boym as a type of patriotic nostalgia aimed towards consolidation of the nation-state and thus, national identity, is however, a manipulation that is disclosed by the fact that different cultures share not only the same folklore elements, but entire stories as well. This aspect, contrary to the concept advocated by nationalistic ideology indicates that the artificially created boundaries between different cultures are so fluid that they can be easily crossed and altered, and that past narratives are neither exclusive, nor authentic.

The folklore sources and certain aspects of their use in the plays that I have discussed, nevertheless point to the fact that folklore as a national denominator is not as purely national as the established belief preaches. Folklore elements that overlap in all of the analysed stories, although Ireland and Macedonia are distant both geographically and culturally, emphasize the idea that authenticity is just as fictitious an expression as is identity politics. For instance, Silyan's metamorphosis evokes Mary's transformation from *The Land* and signifies the repetition of identical elements in different folklore traditions; the image of the Other is represented as an intruder in all the plays, as is the symbol of the house/land which stands for the unity of the nation. Folklore songs are employed in order to confirm the relations to the tradition, and are contrasted, especially in the case of Stefanovski to foreign songs. The same idea is evoked in the plays of Yeats in the employed contrast between Celtic and Christian beliefs. In addition, migration of cultures and their interconnection is recognized in the unfamiliarity of the origin of the folk story of Silyan the Stork. Although it appears in the collection of Marko Tsepenkov as a Macedonian folk tale, when presuming that and searching for its source in Christian legends, Stefanovski was warned that its source may not be Christian, but oriental, possibly Arabic.[113]

[113] *Prikazni od diviot istok*, p. 11.

However, the strongest overtones are provided by the sources on which the general framework of *The Countess Cathleen* and *Proud Flesh* are based, and although manifested in different way, folkloric inauthenticity is clearly recognisable in both the plays. The example of *The Countess Cathleen*, the first play by Yeats staged in Ireland, reveals the ironic mistake that the story about the countess who sells her soul to the demons to save the starved peasants, did not have, as Yeats thought, an Irish source, but rather, a French one. It turned out that it was not an intentional mistake because Yeats seemed to have trusted his first source completely and upon discovering the truth he published the French original in an explanatory note[114] in order to spare himself criticism and public indignity. However, the mistake itself demonstrates his blindness caused by the folkloric enthusiasm and his superficial attitude with regards to the Irish folkloric material, illustrating only his willingness to accept anything suitable for propagation of his ideas as part of his literary production.

In addition, *Proud Flesh* displays a narrative which reveals more about the invention of authentic past than Yeats's supposed original Irish tradition. Its example illustrates Boym's idea that distant past is subjected to manipulation and imagination because no one remembers it. In spite of the fact that it incorporates in itself many sayings, songs, and beliefs taken from what is credited as Macedonian folklore, the central element of the play, the one about the proud flesh is an invention by Stefanovski himself, yet its presentation gives the impression that its source is a part of a traditional belief. Stevo's categorization of the belief of the proud flesh as old wives' tale adds to the spectator's/reader's certainty that it is indeed a part of an existing tradition, whose originality, as previously indicated, can also be disputed because of the constant modification and fluctuation of its elements. The character of the mother Marija, evoking the purity and perfection of Mother Mary[115] (as does Yeats's Mary, although he had inverted her Christian significance), is the embodiment of the traditional Macedonian morality and endurance. She introduces the concept of the "proud flesh," 'a belief that if somebody gets a hair stuck in their throat, flesh will grow around the root of the hair',[116]

[114] *Folklore and W.B. Yeats*, p.16
[115] The name Marija is Macedonian for Mary.
[116] Stefanovski, Goran, 'Proud Flesh', *Ten Modern Macedonian Plays*, ed. by Luzhina, Jelena (Skopje: Matica Makedonska, 2000), p. 124.

flesh which is not human[117] and which will grow so big that it will suffocate them, as a warning from the danger imposed by the foreigners who threaten to destroy their familial unity and tradition. Significantly, she utters 'proud flesh' after she has sung the folk song

> Were I but pure clear water, oh Mother dear,
> I know where I'd run to.[118]

as if trying to indicate the impurity of tradition itself, at the same time longing for some imaginary place where she could purify the stained roots, but is aware of its impossibility. If Mary's Yeats found her land of heart's desire even in death, Stefanovski's Marija is predestined to remain in a tainted world of ideals, in which identity will have to make compromises in order to continue to exist.

Additionally, *Proud Flesh* offers another element which exemplifies the fictitiousness of traditions and our belief in them. It concerns the other female character in the play, Vera, whose miscarriages represent the opposition of the Macedonians to exist in such socio-political and cultural environment that threatens to obliterate it, also indicating the category of self-destruction as a mode of resistance. Yet, despaired because she cannot give birth to a child, Vera sees a local wise woman who casts a spell on her so that the baby she is carrying is born. This paradigm of a magical ritual that is performed in order to exercise its influence over the external world is common in the sources of folklore narratives and is classified as folk superstition. However, the ritual in the play carries only a figurative connotation, as the wise woman herself admits that she performed it just 'to get it over with',[119] as a pattern which is followed as most of the beliefs and traditions are: our belief in them may not be related to the practical world, and yet they persist as socially important narratives that exist in order to sustain and confirm the discourse of our identity.

[117] "Proud flesh" in English is a popular name given to the medical condition known as "keloid scarring", an overgrowth of granulation tissue at the site of a healed skin injury.
[118] *Proud Flesh*, p. 124.
[119] Ibid. p. 118

IV. The Concept of the Other

The figure of the Other in folklore and traditional literature has been conventionally regarded as an intruder that penetrates the intimate and sheltered life and disturbs the balance of a given community. Nevertheless, the link between the Other and the self is not simply one of binary opposition. Although the process of othering creates an opposition between the "domestic" and the identity of the "Other" introducing destabilisation by external factors, their interrelation is based on a mutual interdependence which determines their categorisation; thus the Other stands both as an antipodal as well as a constituent part of the identity in crisis. However, in the plays we mainly recognise the Other as a vehicle of antagonism that needs to be cast off and his/her influences rejected so that the purity and the balance can be restored anew. The discourse of a quest for the purged past that identifies the "domestic" identity as an opposition towards colonisers as representatives of the Other, is referred to by Edward Said as nativism (an attempt to separate completely the colonising from the colonised culture) and with respect to Irishness, Said relates it to Yeats's early writing, thus the plays analysed here as well. Defining the European or metropolitan culture as imperialistic, Said interprets the idea of (re)construction of a virtuous past or 'history without guilt' as Michael Kammen defined nostalgia, as a reaction towards the increasingly materialistic and industrialised metropolitan culture of the oppressors.[120] Given that both the external cultures that are imposed on Irish and Macedonian national identity are metropolitan, Yeats and Stefanovski's abhorrence of the increasing materialism and the colonising structures and cultures that threaten their native "original" culture, is reflected in the depiction of their positive characters that are endowed with values such as spirituality, morality and intellectual or emotional depth. Thus, the concept of the conflicting Other manifests itself as a representation of the inner drives of a nation that is striving to expel the intruder after employing its power as a mechanism to define and (re)create its own identity.

[120] McCarthy, Conor, *The Cambridge Introduction to Edward Said*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Both Yeats and Stefanovski make use of folklore material, stories, songs, beliefs, sayings, in order to challenge the image of the Other. In Yeats's plays we encounter two types of opponent identities that give rise to the concept of the Other that affirm Frazier's suggestion that 'In Yeats's view at this time, neither the Anglo-Irish establishment, nor the revolutionary Catholic masses were capable of leading the nation'.[121] The first category is defined by the colonising English identity, and it appears in *The Countess Cathleen*, although very implicitly in *The Land* as well. The second one is the concept of the Other as an internal structure, namely the Catholic identity which acts a discourse of opposition alongside the already existing discourse of opposition, thus creating a purged "domestic" identity that relied on distant, imaginary folkloric past. Similarly to Yeats, in Stefanovski's *Proud Flesh* we encounter an image of the Other that threatens to obliterate the native "domestic" identity, yet in *The Black Hole* the idea of the Other is inherent in Silyan's character who overcomes it only by (re)discovering his "genuine" identity.

Clash of identities: the domestic Other and the identity of the intruder

The clash of identities in *The Countess Cathleen* is represented on the second level of otherness, that is, in the struggle between the Celtic and the Catholic identity. Although the central importance in the play is attached to the character of the Countess who does not embody characteristics of an archetypal Irish ruler from Yeats's time and is a representation of Maud Gonne, an ardent nationalist (who later converted to Catholicism), the nostalgic character in the play is Aleel, the bard, Yeats's alter-ego, who throughout the play appears not only as her faithful companion, but also stands for the pagan past reinventing the pre-Catholic myths and beliefs:

> Aleel's identity as an artist derives from his [Yeats's][122] intimate connections with the world of Irish myth and legend. He distracts Cathleen from her

[121] *Behind the Scenes*, p.28.
[122] My emphasis.

> sorrows by telling her stories about Queen Maeve, and sings songs about the fairies. Aleel has a kind of immediate and semi-mythical relation to the ancient essence of the Celt.[123]

Therefore, the opposition of the identities is presented through the generated contrast between Aleel's Pagan virtue, and the peasants' (Catholic) infidelity. Cathleen and Oona, her foster-mother, are intermediate characters, who although representing the positive Catholic element in the play, at the end also assume certain Celtic features.

Allel's allusions mainly inspired by pre-Christian folk songs and beliefs infuriate the Catholics in the play, especially Oona, whose character at the beginning stands for the Christian's unawareness and indifference towards the significance of the Celtic cultural identity. One of his pagan folk love songs with which he tries to comfort the saddened Cathleen is of vital importance because it promotes his ideas about merging of the immortals i.e. the fairies, with mortals, i.e. human beings. The song literally 'invites both Aleel and Cathleen to join in the dance' that 'symbolizes the cycle of rebirth going on eternally',[124] and which expresses his 'spiritual and physical longing for Cathleen […] as well as the esoteric dance of death in which mortals join with immortals',[125] thus representing the immortality and the endurance of the Celtic, and the ephemerality of the Christian world. Aleel calls Cathleen to heed the song of the fairy dancers and recognise their powers that would make the sorrow disappear, and thus bring about a positive outcome to the gloomy situation in the country:

> Hear what they sing,
> Those young dancers […]
> Lift up the gown,
> All that sorrow
> Is trodden down.[126]

[123] *Yeats's Nations,* p.63.
[124] *Folklore and W.B. Yeats,* p.120
[125] Ibid., p.121
[126] *The Countess,* p.57, 59.

As in *The Land*, the dancers are young, blithe and beautiful, and representing the antithesis to the grimness of the Catholic Ireland, they establish a stark contrast between both the identities. Oona's disregard for the songs which 'are not thoughts for any Christian ear'[127] and her instant attack on his pre-Christian identity is expressed as a defence mechanism which undervalues the importance of Paganism: 'Talk on; what does it matter what you say, For you have not been christened'.[128]

However, the end of the play carries different overtones. Although Cathleen's Christian death involves angels that take her soul to Heaven, Yeats's chooses to stress imagery related to folklore, and especially the Celtic Otherworld represented in Aleel's Hell's vision that implicitly points to Allel's dominant position and his power over the discourse of the Catholic characters. After the Countess signs the contract with the demons, his vision depicts frightening images from Hell based on different Celtic tales that evoke images from various gods and goddesses from the Celtic mythology.[129] The shift occurs when not only some peasants use vague folklore and allusions to popular belief[130], but when Oona also resorts to folklore imagery as well. Bramsbäck suggests that she, upon uttering 'crouch down, old heron, out of the blind storm',[131] is depicted 'as if she were an ancient druidess'.[132] Yet, Cathleen's acknowledgment of Aleel's dedication and his greatness over hers stand as the most powerful recognition of Celticism:

> God's procreant waters flowing about your mind
> Have made you more than kings and queens; and not you
> But I am the empty pitcher.[133]

Additionally, although mixed with Christian elements, Cathleen's speech that announces her death evokes images of pagan beliefs and fairies as well. Bramsbäck suggests that the

[127] Ibid., p.59.
[128] *The Countess*, p.59
[129] *Folklore and W.B. Yeats*, p.27
[130] Ibid, pp. 52, 53.
[131] *The Countess*, p. 157.
[132] *Folklore and W.B. Yeats*, p. 24.
[133] *The Countess*, p.89.

last line that she utters 'The storm is in my hair and I must go'[134] incorporates the belief that whirlwinds are associated with 'fairy troops and demons in the air'.[135] Hence, endowing the Catholic characters with implicit folkloric features, Yeats suggested the slow transformation of their identity and gradual incorporation of the Celtic Other into the identity of the domestic self implying that embracing their Celtic past and retaining the memory of their ancestors' spirit, signifies recovery of the nature of their true Irishness.

In *The Land* the contrast between these two identities is more obvious. Although technically, the Faery Child, and to a certain extent, Mary, represent the intruder in the house, they stand for what Yeats regarded as domestic identity because the Land represents the notion of the genuine home, and despite the Child's seeming wickedness, her intentions do not embody immorality since she belongs to an identity which is both morally and spiritually superior to the one produced by the bleak Irish reality.

The contrast between Christianity and Paganism is established at the very beginning of the play when the family not only deprives Mary of any support, but they make various attempts to persuade her to abandon her dreams. Brigit, her mother-in-law, whose judgement is the harshest, believes that folkloric seduction that derives from the fairy books is entirely Mary's fault. Yet, Shawn, her husband, Maurteen, her father-in-law and Father Hart are less critical and make attempts to be more understanding, although they also aim to alter her passion towards folklore and the fairies. Maurteen urges Father Hart to 'persuade the colleen to put down the book'[136] and thus distance herself from the powers of folklore literature and instead focus on the real world. Ascribing her interest in folklore to her youth, the priest tries to convince her that growing out of her infatuation would announce the start of her conformity to the norms of the familial life and to the pattern followed by all the other Catholics that tend to retain the conventional Catholic identity. Upon understanding that the priest's words are uttered in vain, Maurteen changes the strategy of persuasion, and believing that Mary might be more inclined towards material acquisitions, he offers her gold. Introducing Maurteen's

[134] Ibid, p.163.
[135] *Folklore and W.B. Yeats*, p. 54.
[136] *The Land*, p.184.

materialistic inclination, Yeats incorporates elements that oscillate between both *The Countess* and *The Land*, contrasting Mary to the Catholic peasants who succumbed to the promises of materialistic gains. However, not a single tactic of dissuasion, or display of affection can discourage Mary's untainted idealism; neither the ruthless criticism from her mother-in-law, nor the sweet loving words from her husband can reach her heart.

Thus, the family, including their friend, Father Hart, become increasingly alarmed by the fact that the fairies that do not belong to the Christian world have seduced Mary and are terrified of the thought that they 'may steal new-married brides',[137] referring to the invincible powers of folkloric enthusiasm to attract and lure young, inexperienced people. Additionally, throughout the play Christians associate fairies with wicked spirits that may harm their safety, and while everyone else is full of dread and fear, Mary's belief in the purity of their soul implies that it is the Catholic pre-conceptions that the pagans' wickedness is inborn and that they are sinful because they do not practise Christianity which had led to their undeserved banishment and marginalisation. Father Hart's counter-response is full of Christian imagery depicting the punishment that they will suffer for their infidelity, which also applies to those who are subjected to the influences of the fairies. As if pronouncing a prophecy, he concludes: 'who goes with them must drive through the same storm'.[138]

On May Eve they sense the increasing threat from the supernatural powers that may enter the house. Becoming more agitated, they seek for means that would save them from harm and danger and as good Christians, they put all their faith in the Cross that hangs on the wall. However, seduced by her beauty and seeming innocence, they let the Faery Child in the house and provide her with a warm place to stay and milk as well. Regarding Yeats's decision to rely on folk belief, as Taylor argues, that 'supernatural agents are particularly active in the temporal world on May Eve and that to give them fire and milk on that day, however inadvertently, is to place oneself in their power',[139] he suggests once again that despite the fierce opposition towards paganism, Catholics found it difficult to resist its appeal. Once invited in the house, the charms of the Faery Child become so strong that even Father Hart, the symbol of Catholicism, who claims that the

[137] Ibid., p. 186.
[138] Ibid., p.188.
[139] Taylor, Richard, *A Reader's Guide to the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), p.31.

fairies are 'the children of the Fiend'[140] is enchanted by her to the extent that he removes the crucifix, which clearly represents Yeats's intention to mock Catholic faith by presenting signs of its diminishment even with the clerics. Thus, the image of Jesus for the Faery Child is just an 'ugly thing on the black cross'.[141] As Taylor argues, 'the reaction of the Faery Child to the crucifix on the wall emphasises the preoccupation of Christianity with sin and suffering, with good conduct as an investment towards success in this world and salvation in the next',[142] reasons for which the Irish stayed focused on the sternness of the earthly life that prohibited the flow of unconstrained, liberal ideas and actions. Additionally, the exhibited cross in the house suggests the materialistic exploitation and the growing commercialisation of Christ's suffering. The popularisation of the symbol of the crucifix and Christ's victimisation in Ireland imply the hypocrisy of the ordinary people whose piousness reflected their submissive need for a strong factor of identification, rather than true faith, dedication and activism. Thus, Christ seems ugly because his torture has been appropriated as a symbol of national identity. Yet, undoubtedly, Yeats did not object to the faith itself so much as he objected to the passive consent of the middle-class Catholics with the Church and its power exercised over them. His claim that 'the Catholic Church created a system only possible for Saints'[143] and therefore that it may exercise prolonged power, signifies that the purity and strictness, the stern morality propagated by the Church kept people encaged in the Catholic system of values and forced them into spiritual submission. Therefore, all the Catholic characters seem constrained by the power of a system whose hierarchy has made them meek and obedient, hypocritically pious and materialistic, serious and dissatisfied, because it has deprived them of the coveted and deserved feeling of freedom.

An additional effect of antagonism between the Pagan and the Christian identity, apart from the dialogue, is produced, as Taylor also indicates, by the imagery, as well as singing and dancing in the play. Thus, the pagan images of the magical quicken wood, fire and milk stand in opposition to the Christian crucifix, bread and wine, as emblems of suffering and sacrifice. The Child's enticing songs of freedom and ecstasy, her dancing,

[140] *The Land*, p.187.
[141] Ibid., p.138
[142] *A Reader's Guide to the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, p.30.
[143] Yeats, W.B., *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955), p.363.

the speech she delivers call Mary to 'gaze upon a merrier multitude'[144] in the land of such Celtic deities as 'White-armed Nuala, Aengus of the Birds, Fiachra of the hurtling foam'[145] whose allusions to beauty and gaiety are opposed to the Christian God as a symbol of anguish and distress. Thus, the Celtic identity towards which Yeats is inclined carries not only a dimension of originality and longevity of the Irish nation, at the same time instigating the idea of the revival of the past and strengthening collective values, but suggests that all the markers of that identity imply happier prospects full of hope and optimism, unlike the depressing, material identity suggested by Catholicism.

The Land ends with the desperate assumption by the Catholics who assert that Celticism (referred to by them tendentiously as the spirits of evil, but represented otherwise) has already started to play an important role and could be the only possible solution to the issue of national identity. Therefore, in Yeats's choice to end the play with the victory of Celticism we recognise his determination to distinguish himself from the dominating fractions in Ireland at that time; presenting not only Mary's escape into the distant world of beauty and freedom, but also the decision of many other Catholic souls to join the Land, Yeats expressed his position that many will abandon the Catholic dogma and recognise the roots of Celticism as their true identity:

> Thus do the spirits of evil snatch their prey
> Almost out of the very hand of God;
> And day by day their power is more and more,
> And men and women leave old paths.[146]

In *The Black Hole* Stefanovski offers a different manner of representations of identities that are in collision. Faced with identity crisis, Silyan carries in himself a certain opposition since he is defined both as his own self and his own Other. Split between multiple identities, he is in constant search of his other self which he finds, in death or rebirth, only after he accepts his tradition. The play begins with a folk song in

[144] *The Land*, p.205.
[145] Ibid., p.205.
[146] Ibid., p.210.

which he urges Svetle, one of his lovers for whom he remains nameless as well, not to love him because he is a foreigner:

> Love me not, lassie,
> Don't lose your heart,
> For I come from far away, lassie,
> Tomorrow I'll depart
> For foreign lands, lassie,
> For foreign parts.[147]

Stefanovski himself claims that he sees the folk story as a story about division, the feeling of being lost, roaming and unable to cope with the world; as a story which deals with the crisis of identity, but at the same time, a story about initiation and courage. He states that it could be taken as an example that alienation could be overcome with willingness and work, that the 'character could be regained through a painful metamorphosis of a new birth'.[148] In his play, constantly anguished by the feeling of not belonging, Silyan wins the battle over his insecurity by himself and only by going back to his roots when, in a conversation with his dead mother, she reveals to him that although there is no Silyan any more,[149] he had brought himself into the world on his own.[150]

This story has also retained the traditional moral that the family and the community are symbols of unity and stability, and that an individual's rejection to belong in the native environment will result in punishment. However, it additionally carries the meaning that everybody deserves to find their place as individuals, and that the individual struggle of the modern man to accept the national identity is strenuous and sacrificing, as well as that alteration, offering new perspectives and interpretations of the individual self, can be spiritually rewarding. Therefore, despite the gloomy overtones and the negative criticism that prevail in the play, the rebirth of Silyan symbolises the possible birth of a new Macedonian identity rid of the past painful experiences. Nevertheless, only after

[147] *The Black Hole*, p. 3.
[148] *Prikazni od diviot istok*, pp. 28-29
[149] *The Black Hole*, p.34.
[150] Ibid.,p.34

enduring the process of recognising their importance and purified from his insecurity, can the individual Macedonian annihilate the Other in himself/herself and accept his/her place in the community.

The image of the Other as an oppressor/coloniser

Depicting the demons in *The Countess Cathleen* that offer to buy the souls for gold as a symbol which underlies the importance of shallow, materialistic, earthly life, Yeats introduces the representation of the Other as a coloniser that negates and oppresses both the Celtic and Catholic Irish identity. In the play, the demons disguise themselves in two forms: as merchants that hide their claws with gloves, and horned owls, an image that was associated with evil spirits in popular belief.[151] Negating the values of the spiritual world they appear as representations of the materialistic features of the English culture which stressed the aspects of money-earning and everything that was tangible and temporary. These penetrating influences of the non-native culture threatened to destroy completely the whole Irish nation. In the play Shemus Rua and his son Teigue who remain faithful to the demons belong to this category of ideologically deluded people, and are subjected to the repressive identity of the intruders.

The ultimate mission of the demons is to take Cathleen's soul and deprive her of the most vital symbol of Irishness – her identity. As an Irish ruler, the subjection of her identity would signify that the English have obtained a complete control over Ireland. Yet, she must not be killed: 'her soul must come to us of its own will',[152] which suggests no use of violence but of voluntary subjugation which, in turn, insinuates partly the historical triumph of the English conquest of Ireland. Additionally, Cathleen's sacrifice is an act aimed at collective salvation, her fear to defy the demons signifying the recognition of the authority of the English and Yeats's suggested Catholic vulnerability. While Cathleen admits that she is afraid of their demonic air even when they appear in

[151] *Folklore and W.B. Yeats*, p. 92.
[152] *The Countess*, p. 105.

front of her as human beings, Aleel, on the other hand, openly confronts them. On two occasions he shows that his Celtic identity makes him invulnerable. The first one is the demons' attempt to kill him, yet they realise that can do him no harm:

> One drew his knife […]
> He made this stroke at me; but it is nothing. [153]

The second one is a rather Freudian guilt complex situation when because of his inability to help Cathleen he offers to sacrifice his own soul. In that scene the demons not only refuse to take his soul, but do not even dare to touch it: 'Begone from me, I may not touch it',[154] says one of the demons, the other adding that his gaze has filled him 'with shaking and dreadful fear'[155] implying that "authentic" Irishness weakens the powers of the colonisers.

In *The Land*, however, the Celtic identity that stands in opposition to the English Other can be recognised on a more subtle level, namely in the imagery. The bird-like depiction of the Faery Child, her youth, beauty, innocence, her singing and the joyous atmosphere that she creates in the house luring everybody, and her references to Mary as a white bird with crest of gold and silver feet, generates a sharp contrast to the materialistic seduction of the demons that transform into black owls in *The Countess* evoking gloomy and apocalyptic visions of the times-to-come and that stand for the imposed English identity. Therefore, the image of the Child, despite her manifestation as an intruder that disrupts the balance of the familial coherence, carries positive overtones, and is juxtaposed to the image and the portrayal of the demons as outsiders and intruders.

Hence, the Celtic images of folklore in both *The Countess* and *The Land* stand in opposition both to Catholic Irish identity, and English identity that penetrates Ireland threatening to wipe out every trace of Irishness. Interestingly, for the ordinary Catholics who tended to retain their identity, both the English demons and the fairies are symbols of evil, and Aleel's character is unwelcome. Nevertheless, most of the characters in *The*

[153] Ibid., p.77.
[154] Ibid., p.141.
[155] Ibid., p.142.

Countess evoke implied Celtic imagery at the end of the play, and Father Hart laments in his final speech that eventually the world of the fairies will prevail.

Although in Stefanovski's *Proud Flesh* there is no conflict between the Christian and folklore elements, and in fact, certain folklore elements and superstitions are merged with Christian beliefs, it offers a similar solution to the concept of the Other as an intruder that destroys the harmony of the domestic identity. The play depicts the period before the beginning of the Second World War in Skopje, revolving around the life of the working-class Macedonian family Andrejević as a paradigm for Macedonian society. The name itself is deliberately *serbianised* (the Macedonian version would be *Andreevski* or *Andreevi*) in order to stress the Serbian control in Macedonia and the political ideology in that period, which also required a change in the last names. Thus, the play describes the moral, ideological, and economic decay of the family that is faced with the external threat from both the Serbian propaganda, represented by Sivić, and the fascist regime whose penetration is represented through the ruthless character of Stevo's German boss Hermann Klaus. As an outsider, Klaus defines Macedonian identity as identity in crisis caused by people's inferiority complex due to the lack of tradition and historicity, and the play depicts the struggle of the Macedonian family with his accusations and humiliations, as well as his attempts to destroy their identity. He is the cause of most of the family's misfortunes, but as Misel Pavlovski suggests, he only accelerates the development of the proud flesh, and is not its direct source.[156] Not inadvertently the father refers to him as the devil, evoking the same materialistic and merciless attitude of Yeats's demons. Like them, he offers materialistic gains in return for Stevo's identity. Upon uttering: 'I'm offering you the chance of severing the umbilical cord tying you to this tribe of yours and of rising to achieve an identity of your own',[157] he demands that Stevo should accept his identity.

The main element that symbolizes the threat and the disruption of the familial unity is the "proud flesh" materialized into a foreign body that attacks the system slowly destroying it. The flesh, which Marija believes is in her throat suffocating her, indicates

[156] Pavlovski, Misel, 'Divo Meso na Goran Stefanovski' in *Sto godini makedonska drama* ed. by Siljan, Rade (Skopje: Matica makedonska, 1992), p. 627.
[157] *Proud Flesh*, p.132.

the impact of the foreign ideologies that imperil the national identity. Anguished, she cries against the passivity of her sons who make no heed of the intruder:

> You can't breathe with your throat swelling up, you can't sing. The flesh must be rooted out with the fingernails and the wound burnt with red-hot embers. But all you do is quarrel. You couldn't care less. I look at you and I don't know who you are. I don't recognize anyone any more.[158]

Although the proud flesh is introduced later in the play when Klaus visits their house symbolically introducing him as a materialized threat, from the very beginning Marija's prophetic dream (another common element that prevails in Macedonian folklore) already announces the shattered familial stability. However, despite its gloomy overtones that the backbone that provides stability will be infested, the disease will be eventually eradicated through a painful process of suffering:

> I had a dream I was cut in half. And there was a big worm where my backbone was supposed to be. […] And then someone came and pulled it out. It was an agony.[159]

Apart from the beliefs and dreams, throughout the play Stefanovski employs several folklore songs which stand in opposition to the foreign songs, rhymes and poems. In this regard, Simon's choice of songs is especially significant. Initiating and closing the circle of several songs with a well-known traditional folk song that is intersected by a foreign children's rhyme and a Serbian song as expressions of his agonies and the struggle with the foreign identity, Simon personifies an identity lost and regained. However, the same folk song carries different overtones at the beginning and the end of the play. Involving a countdown from six to one, at the beginning the song and the context in which it is sung hint at the diminishment of the number of the family members

[158]Ibid., p. 127
[159] Ibid., p. 95.

(not accidentally it is six of them) as the vulnerability of their identity is gradually increasing:

> Six for the months in half a year
> Five for the fingers on a hand […]
> One for the nightingale that sings early
> in the spring.[160]

Yet, at the end, realizing that the proud flesh is going to suffocate him, as an announcement of his miserable death in a brothel, he remembers the folk song that defined him from the beginning, but this time it offers pre-death consolation and restoration of his identity.

On the contrary, his brother Stevo never resorts to folklore; in order to detach himself from his roots he recites verses from Petrarch, speaks fluent German, and takes dancing classes. Aspiring to change his identity by cutting the family ties and vanish from the country which is 'all dirty and smells of the farmyard'[161] as Klaus, whom he lets in the house like Yeats's peasants that welcomed the demons, defines it. Stevo desperately wants to become the Other and flee from his native identity:

> I'm sick to death of you! Bloody peasants! You cling to some worn-out principles and customs of yours […] you treat everything unfamiliar as cursed, alien and hostile! The main thing is to keep your nose clean, stick together, be one of us! But Europe is calling to me, Europe![162]

Disillusioned, after Simon's death, and Andrej's imprisonment (in prison, Andrej realizes that he has been infested with the proud flesh as well), Stevo writes his own poem as a manifestation of regaining his own identity and rebels against Klaus: 'You think your way for me is the only way? Well it's not! My pulse beats to a different

[160] Ibid., p. 105.
[161] Ibid., p. 110.
[162] Ibid., p. 127.

tune!',[163] namely the tune that is Macedonian, not foreign. Alongside Stevo's spiritual liberation, the overthrow of the Other is suggested by the unborn baby whose heart beats in Vera's womb and Marija's folk nursery rhyme addressed to the baby.

[163] *Proud Flesh*, p.140.

V. Representation of Home

Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga argue that while anthropologists have made attempts to make a distinction among the concepts of "house" and "home", "household" and "family", 'the unity (or mutuality) of these concepts is embedded in many European cultural traditions'.[164] Additionally, the term "house" often signifies or is interchanged with "home":

> while "house" implies a physical structure or shelter, "home" defines a place of origin and retreat, such as one's birthplace or country. […] "Home," thus, may take on the meaning of a territory, a physical reference point, a symbol of self, or manifestation of family identity.[165]

Therefore, as a category that occupies diminished social space, the notion of house as home appears also as a synecdoche to symbolize the concept of homeland, and the concept of family may symbolize the nation. The equivalence of these concepts in anthropological terms can be additionally applicable to the connotations that they carry as symbolic representations in folklore and literature. Hence, the relevance of the concepts of "house" and "land" to the analysis of Yeats and Stefanovski's plays in the context of national identity, as well as their interchangeability (as anthropological investigations have shown), shall be explored through their classification as identity markers and symbols whose stability contributes to national cohesion.

In this regard, the interchangeability of the concept of "home" with "territory" or "homeland" provides a clearer perspective on national identity, since as Anthony Smith argues, homeland is one of the components that define the Western model of the nation-state and national identity,[166] the homeland representing 'repository of historic memories and associations'[167] that ensures the historicity of the nation. Incorporating the idea of

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[164] Birdwell-Pheasant, Donna, and Lawrence-Zúñiga, Denise, ed. *House Life: Space, Place and Family in Europe* (New York, Oxford: Berg, 1999), p.5.
[165] Ibid., p.6.
[166] The Western model later on influenced the non-Western model of nation-state whose principles did not primarily and necessarily include territory as a constituent element.
[167] *National Identity*, p.9.

belonging to a non-abstract category like the one of specific territory or dwelling, these concepts allow both the individual and the collective to stay within the boundaries of confined space that internalizes folklore, nurture the domestic culture and identity, as well as provide retreat and shelter from the Other, at the same time enabling unity and stability. Additionally, being a product of history, the home(land) acts as temporal paradigm as well, linking past to the present, and additionally incorporating future, and can therefore be considered as an element to which nostalgic mechanisms can be applied. However, the danger of nostalgia according to Boym occurs when it starts reflecting the tendency to confuse the actual home with the imaginary one, thus creating an idea of a delusionary homeland.

With regard to the analysed plays by Yeats and Stefanovski, the use of home as illusory category is more evident in Yeats's works due to the fact that he introduces an escapist idea of home as an imaginary spatial and temporal category, yet in Stefanovski's plays the idea of home is represented as an actual dwelling, a house which establishes the connection to the national roots standing for the entire homeland. Although in *The Black Hole* we recognize the idea of a remote imaginary land which exists as an opposition to Silyan's "authentic" home in the source of the play, the folk story *Silyan: The Stork*, the land is employed only as symbolic category with relation to the trauma of the loss of home/identity. Additionally, the diverse semantic origins of the words that denote "home" enable, to a certain extent, the existing differentiation between the approaches employed by the two playwrights. As Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga argue, in the English language the term "house" derives from the Old English *hus* and is related to *huden*, meaning "to hide", implying also "hut", "huddle" and "hoard". Conveying 'the fragile and exposed side of the dwellers'[168] the northern European term suggests that home is a space for retreat, a sanctuary-like shelter. Thus, in Yeats's plays "house" or "home/land" offers protection from the Other, but also acts as a warden of tradition and culture that is preserved (or hoarded) within the home boundaries. On the other hand, the Macedonian word for home "dom" derives from the Latin term *domus* signifying "domicile" as well as "domesticate", "dominate" and "dominion". This construction of the house/home, evident in Stefanovski's plays, 'produces a symbol of power, rulership

[168] *House Life*, p.6.

and ownership with rights and privileges enabling the dweller to impose through possession and transform through habitation'.[169] Thus, in *Proud Flesh* the character of the father is the pillar of the family and as an agent of familial and national identity he dominates over the rest of the family. Moreover, acting as a guardian of the object that he himself had built he also makes the crucial decisions with regards to the future of the existing home. In *The Black Hole*, on the other hand, Silyan loses his identity and at the same time becomes estranged from his home, and in order to regain it he needs to be domesticated again and acquire ownership and control over his identity by transforming his own self – owning his home and, eventually, letting the home own him.

In Yeats's plays as with the notion of the Other, the notions of house/land have a double perspective, namely they are represented as native domestic space and the space that belongs to the Other, corresponding to the respective identities. Namely, in *The Countess Cathleen*, both the castle and the land represent Catholic Ireland, and Aleel's home is the land of Fairies, which similarly to the Fairy Child's land in *The Land of Heart's Desire* stands for the nostalgic idea of an imaginary home where the home of the Bruins epitomizes Catholic Ireland. However, the castle and the land in *The Countess* are not tantamount to the idea produced by Bruins' house. Whereas in the former they are symbols of the homeland that is threatened by an external enemy, in the latter, the house is a bastion of Catholicism, and thus it represents an enemy to the "genuine" homeland that has preserved Celtic heritage.

Yeats's portrayal of the two different representations of Ireland in *The Land*, thus, differs in their categorisation both in space and time. One is the pre-colonised dream-like invention, the realm of freedom and happiness, the Land of Heart's Desire, and is superimposed onto the other, the house of the Bruins, which stands for Yeats's contemporary, harsh, and dull Ireland, the land of Catholicism and material aspirations. Disillusioned by the dreariness of the latter Mary yearns to follow the Princess Edain, a daughter of the King of Ireland, who once in old times heard a voice singing on a May Eve and:

[169] Ibid., p.6.

MARY: Followed, half-awake and half-asleep,
Until she came into the land of Faery,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue.
And she is still there, busied with a dance,
Deep in the dewy shadow of a wood.[170]

This untroubled imaginary land that represents vastness and eternity is a space in which the Faery Child tempts her to go because there 'kind tongues bring no captivity',[171] where sincerity and honesty are possible as categories detached from the superficiality of the everyday hypocrisy of the "real world". Nevertheless, the family tries to put an end to Mary's infatuation with the idyllic world of fairies, and relocate her thoughts into the fixed spatial dimension of the house, that is, the modern-day Ireland in which the family feels protected and sheltered. Thus, they perceive Celticism as a threat that imperils the home of the already established Catholic identity: Briget dreads the idea that 'she would bring evil on the house',[172] Father Hart dogmatically claims that 'God binds us to Himself and to the hearth'[173] and advises her to think of their home and her duties in it.[174] However, succumbing to the Fairy child's innocence and the influences of Celtic identity, the family eventually bids welcome to her in their house, thus allowing fulfilment of Mary's desperate cry for freedom:

Come, fairies, take me out of this dull house!
Let me have all the freedom that I have lost. [175]

[170] *The Land*, p.184.
[171]Ibid., p.206.
[172] Ibid., p.189.
[173]Ibid., p.193.
[174] Ibid., p.205.
[175] Ibid., p.192.
Many critics tend to interpret these lines with regards to the freedom Mary lost with she became married, yet given the social significance of marriage in Christian tradition and the stability that it offered within the community, they refer at the same time to the restraints of Catholicism.

In the end, Mary gains her freedom, but only in death. However, transcending to the idyllic World of Fairies she attains what Yeats considered to be her real identity that was lost before Ireland became Christian, and thus, her death is represented as an act of homecoming and freedom from the constraints of the material world of Catholic Ireland.

In *The Countess* Aleel's home is also an idyllic Fairy land, yet the image of Cathleen's castle and her land remain an embodiment of Catholic Ireland at the time of the Famine, and thus appear as strong bond-creating symbols which evoke the importance of Irish national identity that the Countess recurrently insists on preserving. His love toward Maud Gonne who converted to Catholicism and the vulnerability of Irish national identity after the painful past experience made Yeats focus more on the "real" existing land, rather than an imaginary one. His choice to represent Catholic Ireland as a home rests on two ideas: criticism toward Catholics who sold their identity for material gains, and representation of the fatal outcome of this barter as a reminder of the sacrifice that is required to rectify the incident.

The Countess opens with the representation of the famine, introducing the starving Rua family that is unexpectedly visited by Cathleen, Oona, and Aleel who have lost their way home to the 'old grey castle with a kitchen garden, a cider orchard and a plot for flowers', a heavenly place which is, as Mary Rua adds: 'a place that's set among impassable walls, as though world's trouble could not find it out'.[176] Introducing the idea of the castle as a symbol of Ireland, Yeats alludes to the potential loss of the beautiful, secluded homeland, which for centuries struggled to remain behind its own walls and maintain its uniqueness and peace. However, as the gloomy atmosphere suggests, almost no signs of improvement can be noticed; the paths which lead to the castle 'are overgrown with thickets',[177] and Yeats's despair for the future is mirrored in his alter ego Aleel who 'is so wrapped up in dreams of terrors to come, that he can give no help'.[178]

After a long walk they finally manage to reach the castle only to find out that someone had broken in and stolen food from the garden. The thieves are starving peasants whose deeds parallel souperism in the sense that they can be interpreted as

[176] *The Countess*, p.17
[177] Ibid., p.17.
[178] Ibid., p. 17, 19.

treason, and although destructive to the country, Cathleen approves of the theft. Presuming that they had no other option she does not hold the Irish peasants responsible for being forced to sin in order to cope with the hunger, and thus absolves their contribution to and complicity in English colonization. Cathleen's willingness to sacrifice everything she owns, except for the castle/country itself, in order to buy off people's souls is expressed in her appeal to the steward: 'Keeping this house alone, sell all I have',[179] and later on, knowing that Ireland can provide shelter for the suffering Irish that need to find an escape from the English whose demonic claws dig into their home:

> CATHLEEN. 'Come, follow me, […]
> Till I have changed my house to such a refuge
> That the old and ailing, and all weak of heart,
> May escape from beak and claw.'[180]

Moreover, even though she knows that here (in Catholic Ireland) she finds 'no way, no end'[181] she categorically rejects Aleel's pleas to leave the house and live in a land which, resembling The Land of Heart's Desire, is an imaginary retreat of immortality and happiness:

> He bids me to go […]
> Where you would pluck the harp, when the trees
> Had made a heavy shadow about our door,
> And talk about the rustling of the reeds.[182]

However, although 'life would be most happy'[183] there, Cathleen expresses her willingness to remain and sacrifice herself, even in the worst of times, in the only place that is home for her, but a place which would never become a real home for Yeats's alter ego Aleel.

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[179] Ibid., p. 75.
[180] Ibid., p.79.
[181] Ibid., p.85.
[182] Ibid. p.85.
[183] Ibid., p.85

In Stefanovski's plays the home of the "genuine" identity is not such an abstract category as Yeats's representations of the fictitious fairy land. In *Proud Flesh*, the house of the Andrejević is a clear symbol of the familial, and hence, national unity, and the fact that Sylvan in *The Black Hole* does not really have a home is related to his identity crisis and the quest for his home and identity.

In *Proud Flesh* the disruption of the familial life is primarily suggested by the Other that not only symbolically generates decomposition of their physical selves in the form of proud flesh, but also as a person, an outsider who is invited in the house. Additionally as the resentment of the family members towards the house increases, the familial breach becomes more profound. Andrejević's house is a space in which the past nostalgic moments are preserved: family lunches, childhood memories, celebrations of the Saint's Day in honour of the patron saint of the house, yet it is also a source of misfortunes: it deprived the father of his ability to use his legs, thus creating a special bond between them not only in the form of mutual ownership, but of domination as well. For the sons, who aspire to have a different life, it becomes a cage which entraps them, and consequently they start avoiding the rituals of unity. Feeling suffocated, Simon announces his destructive attitude: 'You can't say a thing in this house. I'm going to throw a couple of cans of petrol over the place and watch it make a fine blaze'.[184]

Klaus's offer to buy the house additionally increases the familial discord. The father, unable to sever the bonds with the identity that the house represents, struggles also with the realization of the fact that his sons are tragic characters with twisted values and morality who refuse to accept their identity regardless of the flaws that accompany it:

> DIMITRIJA: Don't lay a finger on this house. This is mine.
> STEVO: They'll pay us for it. More than the place is worth.
> DIMITRIJA: Nobody can pay me for this house. Who is going to pay me for these legs of mine? It was this roof I fell from.
> STEVO: We're not talking about your legs, Dad.
> […]

[184] *Proud Flesh*, p. 96.

STEVO: A master builder who falls off the scaffolding! Take a look at this house you built!

DIMITRIJA: I built it as well as I knew how. And if you want to knock it down, get out of here and don't come back, you thankless bastard! [185]

When the demolition of the house is announced Marija kindheartedly invites the demolishers in. Putting a scarf on her head she gets some bread and salt in order to give them welcome. The irony veiled in the performance of this traditional Macedonian folk ritual of greeting guests suggests that it was not only the intruder (the proud flesh) in the house that ate into their identity, but that the guilt lies in their consent to let the Other create discord in the family that contributed to their destruction as well. The last scene of the play reveals the house in ruins and Marija chanting the traditional blessings that the masons uttered upon building the house:

MARIJA: When the workmen built the house they shouted:

We've raised high the roof beams
Now may God bless this house
And grant its owner a good long life
And health for all his family.[186]

This reiteration of the past event in different circumstances in the present carries in itself nostalgic reminiscence of the idealized memory, but also announces their rebirth – the masons will raise a new house again, they will say the blessings, and although the future remains vague, certain optimism still exists. Therefore, this repeated folk ritual signifies that the destruction of the house did not completely obliterate the identity; it rather represents reconciliation with the past and recognition of the trauma as part of the preservation, but also transformation of the identity. In acknowledgement of his identity Stevo fires a shot as the ultimate desperate attempt to rebel against everything that

[185] Ibid., pp.126, 128.
[186] Ibid., p. 141.

estranged him from his home. Vera says she thought she could hear the baby's heartbeat, thus announcing the hope for a new strength that could be acquired and the new life that could commence.

In *The Black Hole* Stefanovski's Silyan appears as a character that wants to annihilate space as a category that binds him to his past: first he rejects his own home frequently leaving his family behind, and then he is expelled by his wife who tells him to come back (that is, reclaim his real home) when he transforms into 'another man, a new man'[187]. Thus, Silyan dispossesses his home, and in the end he wants to displace himself in a different space, discarding everything that connects him to his past life:

> There'll be no me there any more. No name, no past, no future. No tradition. No morality. I won't owe anybody anything. I won't expect anything. I'll just be.[188]

However, after his death or after he becomes invisible, Silyan realizes his dependency on both space and time, especially the need to possess and dominate them. Like Silyan from the folk story, he accepts his ancestors' narrative, yet only after the conversation with his dead mother who has come to guide his way. She tells him the story of Silyan the Stork who is punished for leaving his home and neglecting his family after the fulfillment of his mother's curse:

> My son, my son. May you turn into two birds and fly out of this house of ours and go into the fields and sit among the thorn bushes and look for one another and never be able to find yourself.[189]

Unlike the mythical Silyan's mother, the mother in Stefanovski's Silyan helps him "find himself" and realize that he, like the mythical Silyan, was lost and needs to return home. Thus, his discourse after his rebirth transforms as well - his cry of denunciation of identity is reversed into a desperate cry for identity recognition:

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[187] *The Black Hole,* p. 29.
[188] Ibid., p. 29.
[189] Ibid., p. 33.

> We want a name, a past, a future. Some kind of tradition and morality. We want to owe somebody something. We want to expect something. We want to be. Who is going to pay us special allowances for living away?[190]

In the end, the invisible reborn Silyan returns home to his family. Watching the dialogue between his wife and his father and observing his children that wake up as they sense his presence, he feels cursed because he cannot join and reunite with them. Embodying Silyan the Stork, in anguish, he utters the monologue taken from the folk story praying to God to help him leave the wasteland and take him back home again. Therefore, despite his spiritual transformation, Silyan realizes that in order to regain his identity completely, he needs to repossess his home and acquire recognition by his family/nation.

The homecoming theme and the representation of home as manifestation of identity appear also as the result of the narration of the play which includes triple storyline: *The Black Hole* represents reiteration of the past by employing the framework of the folk story *Silyan: The Stork* which, on the other hand, is also a narrative based on a past belief. The past in this play thus becomes both a category of space in Boym's sense, and a narrative which reappears in different contexts yet not as a simple repetition of itself, but as a concept that implies that the existence of home and identity is impossible unless the past recurs in the present and endures in the future.

[190]Ibid., p.43.

Conclusion

In this study the plays *The Countess Cathleen* and *The Land of Heart's Desire* by William Butler Yeats and *Proud Flesh* and *The Black Hole* by Goran Stefanovski were discussed as a part of the national literary canon in Ireland and Macedonia respectively, and as narratives in which nation, or rather national identity, is encountered as it is written[191] and is later reproduced through the canon. Namely, the plays dealt with national identity discourse by employing folklore elements in order to portray a representation of an "authentic" nation. However, the process not being one sided, it was demonstrated that it is the nation-state that through its institutions provided legitimacy to the representation of national identity as well as to the categories that instigate it - in this case folklore as the central category of the analysis. Therefore the institutions that generate the processes of literary canon formation, like education and the theatre, were seen as vehicles for reproduction of the ideology that enables their existence through official recognition of the elements that are involved in their production. Moreover, for Ireland and Macedonia, the two nation-states that sustain Irish and Macedonian national identity respectively, folklore took on an important role in the process of creation of the literary canon due to the fact that they lacked permanent high culture. Additionally, being subdued by foreign colonising political structures which generated the national identity crisis they were in need (especially after the formation of the official nation-states) of a socio-cultural marker that would prove the assumed exceptionalism, authenticity and longevity of both their national literature and identity.

Given that the portrayal of national identity for the nation-state (as its guardian) assumes immense significance, it was demonstrated that the actual socio-cultural context dictated the rules that determine the canon's dependence on the policy of national identity. Therefore, the clash of the literary works with the prevalent ideology on national identity and its denigration resulted in negative social reception, while affirmation of the national identity policy tended to bring about positive acclaim. Yeats's plays were seen thus as an exemplary case of this policy that at first, due to their anti-Catholic discourse in the predominantly Catholic Ireland were subjected to criticism, and subsequently with

[191] *Nation and Narration.*

the change of politics that institutionally recognised and valued folklore as a strategy that instigated Irish national (therefore neither Catholic, nor Protestant identity) they gained acclaim. Yeats's example also displayed the paradox of the literary canon that claims to represent eternal artistic values, yet it is modified according to the socio-cultural circumstances and, in this particular case, it is in line with the representations of national identity. Stefanovski's plays, on the other hand, due to the long folkloric tradition in Macedonia and its recognition as a category that has provided historicity of the Macedonian nation and at the same time represents a discourse that instigates national identity, received positive reception and their introduction in the canon did not spark off any controversies.

Furthermore, understood as 'induced oblivion or created memory'[192] folklore was regarded as an element that provided the narrative of national identity with an implicit ideological discourse, and addressed with relation to the past, it was explored through the concept of nostalgia as understood by Svetlana Boym. In this regard, folklore forms a part of nostalgia that can be invented and that becomes part of the constructed memory subsequently introduced as a past narrative in the cultural tradition, yet also one which is always transnational since, not only particular segments, but whole stories can be shared by various nations at different periods, easily crossing borders and cultures (as Yeats's French source of *The Countess* and the indefinite source of Stefanovski's *The Black Hole* indicated). Moreover, the concept of the Other and the representation of home, found in all the analysed plays, were referred to as strategies interpolated in folklore narratives and as structures that internalise and nurture domestic culture as cultural basis for national identity, concepts through which the characters recognise and re(claim) their identities. Apart from acting as an external ideological factor that represented a possible counter-identity that may threaten the stability, the figure of the Other also epitomised an internal factor that shattered what was seen as folkloric genuine identity, and the notion of home was analysed both as a homeland as well as a reservoir of national culture and identity.

Therefore, although this study showed that folklore neither offers authenticity nor exclusiveness, it tended to be perceived as genuine cultural testimony and its reconstruction in literature aimed at presenting its elements and structures as

[192] *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture.*

metaphorical representations of past verities created on a particular national soil and by a particular socio-cultural milieu that not only form part not only of the cultural heritage and people's mental framework, but of history as well. By introducing a backdrop of reality and history, in the discussed plays Yeats and Stefanovski created a fusion of factual and fictitious narratives, in which factuality served as a point of departure for the interpretation of the constructed past. For instance, Stefanovski stressed the realistic depiction of his characters endowed with folklore, and set both his plays in an already existing temporal and spatial locale thus evoking factual reality, and Yeats chose to locate *The Countess* at the time of the Great Famine as a painful event in the Irish history, and in *The Land* as a starting point of contrast for his imaginary folkloric land he used a gloomy portrayal of the actual country. Consequently, in addition to strengthening national identity in literary narratives, folklore's alleged authenticity, its transnationality, as well as its fictitiousness, suggested that both the idea of national identity and the national canon can assume the same characteristics of non-exclusivity and stressed their existence as temporal socio-cultural structures. Thus, this study offers an interpretation of the national identity through folklore as a substantiation of the idea that its meaning (as a narrative whose legitimacy is provided by the nation-state and institutionalised through the canon) can be perceived in its reproduction, in the way in which it is written and acknowledged at a given socio-cultural context, and not in the existence of the identity per se.

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